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Maxwell Smart, as he tracks down  
the diabolical Doctor X and his  
six invisible guinea pigs . . .  
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# SORRY, CHIEF...

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Max Smart, Agent  
86 for CONTROL*

*by  
William Johnston*

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Max Smart Loses Control  
Max Smart and the Ghastly Ghost Affair

# Sorry, Chief...

*by*

*WILLIAM JOHNSTON*

A TEMPO BOOKS *Original*



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**SORRY, CHIEF . . .**

# 1.

MAX SMART—known to Control as Agent 86—peered down at the wing-tipped brown-and-white oxford that the shoe clerk had just fitted snugly to his right foot. His left foot was already wearing its mate. As the clerk, still kneeling, glanced up hopefully, Max tested the feel of the shoes on his feet.

“Would you like to walk in them?” the clerk asked.

“What else?” Max replied. “What would I expect to do in them—fly? Just because they’re wing-tips?”

“I meant,” the clerk explained, “would you like to walk around the floor—see how they feel?”

“Good idea,” Max said, rising.

He strolled around the section of chairs, then seated himself again. “They’re a *lit-tle* snug around the middle toe,” Max said.

The clerk stared at him, perplexed. “The *middle* toe? That’s the first time I’ve ever heard *that* comment.”

Max’s eyes narrowed. “This is the first time I’ve ever had these shoes on,” he said.

The clerk nodded dimly.

“However, they’ll probably loosen up after I’ve worn them a while,” Max said. “So . . . I’ll take them.”

“Yes, sir,” the clerk said. “Will you wear them or shall I have them wrapped?”

“I’ll wear them,” Max replied. “When you’ve got a tight middle toe problem, it’s never too soon to start working it out.”

The salesman rose, picking up the shoes that Max had worn into the store. “If you’ll come to the desk with me, sir,” he said, “I’ll have these wrapped.”

Together—with Max limping slightly—they went to the cashier’s desk. The girl at the desk put Max’s old shoes into a box and began wrapping it. As she tucked paper around the box, a telephone rang.

The girl looked at the clerk, then at Max, then continued wrapping.

The telephone rang again.

Max shifted uneasily.

"Your phone is ringing," the clerk said to the girl.

She bit her lip nervously, then said, "That's what I thought. But then I remembered—I don't have a phone."

Max cleared his throat—but said nothing.

The phone rang again.

"Well, *somebody's* phone is ringing," the clerk said edgily.

"Ahhh . . . I think it's mine," Max said.

The clerk and the girl stared at him.

"Your phone?" the clerk said, puzzled.

"My shoe, actually," Max said. "Excuse me."

He took the shoe box from the girl, parted it from the wrapping, opened the box, and took the right shoe from it. Then, as the clerk and the girl stared at him in utter dumbfoundment, he spoke into the sole, while listening at the heel.

*Max:* You-know-who here, Chief. I don't want to mention my number because I'm not alone.

*Chief:* Max? Is that you? Why didn't you answer your shoe?

*Max:* It was tied up in a box, Chief.

*Chief* (disgustedly): Max, sometimes I wonder how you ever got to be a secret agent!

*Max* (wounded): Chief, you know full well how I got to be a secret agent. I got into the wrong line. I thought it was the line for the Christmas show at Radio City Music Hall. How did I know that Control would be recruiting over the holidays? That's usually the slow period.

*Chief:* All right, Max . . . never mind. Report to my office. I have a mission for you. In fact, it may be the most important mission you've ever handled. The fate of the whole civilized world may—

*Max* (breaking in): Yes, I know, Chief—may hang in the balance.

*Chief:* Isn't that important to you, Max?

*Max:* Of course it is, Chief. The fate of the whole civilized world is as important to me as it is to anybody. It's just that . . . well, in *all* my cases the fate of the whole civilized world is hanging in the balance. I'd like to do something different for a change. Something to break the monotony. Like rescuing a pussy cat from a tree.

*Chief:* Max, I promise—the next pussy-cat-up-a-tree case that comes in, you get it.

*Max:* Gee . . . thanks, Chief.

*Chief:* But, right now, *get in here!*

*Max:* I'm on my way, Chief. And . . . Chief. Don't forget.  
*Meowwww!*

There was a loud click on the line.

Max turned back to the clerk and the girl. "I think I better wear the telephone, and you can wrap the brown-and-white wing-tips," he said.

Max changed his shoes, then left the store and got into his car, which was parked at the curb. The car, a sleek sports model, had been specially built for him. It was equipped with a number of "extras" that were invaluable to him in helping him follow his trade.

Getting in behind the wheel, Max switched on the ignition. Or, rather, he intended to switch on the ignition. But, accidentally, his finger pressed the button that fired the forward machine guns. There was a rat-a-tat-tat, and a truck that was passing in front of the car had its top sheared off. The driver of the truck, however, did not notice that his vehicle had been noticeably altered. He drove on.

Max, leaning out the window, called after him. "Sorry about that . . ."

But, as the truck proceeded, Max pulled his head back in and shrugged. "It could happen to anybody," he commented to himself.

A bit rattled, Max reached for the ignition switch again—and this time touched the button that operated the ejection seat. The seat beside him rocketed into the air.

Max tipped his head back and peered up at it—then smiled as the parachute opened and the seat floated leisurely back toward the car.

Nearby, a woman screamed. "The Martians are landing!"

"No, no! That's my car seat!" Max cried.

But the explanation was drowned out in the sounds of pandemonium as the passersby, shrieking and screaming in terror, raced for safety.

One gentleman, however, remained. And, with Max, he watched the car seat gently settle back into place.

"So that's how they look," the gentleman said. "I thought they'd look more like bugs—with antennae."

"This is not a Martian," Max insisted. "It's my car seat."

The gentleman cupped an ear. "Eh? You'll have to speak up. I'm a little hard-of-hearing."

"It's my car seat!" Max bellowed.

The gentleman nodded, smiling. "Yes, it's hard to beat. But, with us talking about sending a man to Mars, it's only natural that they'd send one of their folks down here. Ask him how the trip was."

Resigned, Max turned to the car seat. "How was your trip?" he said. "What'd he say?" the gentleman asked.

"The weather was a little rough over Chicago," Max said.

The gentleman looked at his watch. "Yes, I have to go, myself," he said. "I'm late for work. I'm in the complaint department at the discount store up the street." He tipped his hat to the seat "Have a nice stay," he said. Then he walked on.

Very carefully this time, Max reached for the ignition switch. He found it, started the engine, and pulled out into traffic.

Turning to the seat, he said, "You'll find that, down here, some days are like that"

Minutes later, Max entered the Chief's office. He found that two of his fellow agents were already there. They were Agent 99, a slender, attractive brunette young lady, and Agent K-13, otherwise known as Fang, a pudgy, attractive blond young sheepdog.

Max greeted them warmly. "Good-morning, 99," he said. "Woof, Fang."

"Rorff!" Fang replied.

"Oh, nothing—I had a little trouble with the car," Max answered.

"Max, we're all going to be working together on this case," 99 said. "You and I and Fang."

Max looked hurt. "I'm the senior agent," he said. "I'm supposed to tell *you* that."

99 lowered her eyes. "I'm sorry, Max."

Max shrugged. "No harm done. Let's not be petty about it. After all, we want to get along, since we're all going to be working together on this case."

99 brightened. "Oh, are we, Max? That's wonderful."

"I thought you'd be happy to hear it," Max smiled.

"Rorff!" Fang said.

"I don't know *where* you heard it before," Max frowned. "But if it wasn't from me, it wasn't official." He turned to the Chief. "Now, then, Chief, what exactly is this case?"

"Well, Max," the Chief began, starting to rise from behind his desk.

"Just a second, Chief," Max broke in. "Isn't this Top Secret?"

“Yes, Max.”

“Then . . . shouldn’t we lower the Cone of Silence?”

The Chief sighed. “All right, Max.” He lifted his eyes toward the ceiling. “Lower the Cone of Silence.”

Immediately, a plastic bubble began to descend toward his desk. When it was in place, Max and the Chief crawled under, isolating themselves inside the bubble.

“Now then—what’s the case, Chief?” Max said.

“But what about 99 and Fang?” the Chief said. “They’re outside, they can’t hear us.”

Max frowned. “Yes, there *is* that problem. Since they’ll be working with me, they’ll need to know the details of the case, too.” He pondered a second, then said, “I know—I’ll step outside and let 99 come in here. Ladies first, you know.”

“But, Max, then *you* won’t know what the case is about.”

“HMMMMMMMM. Then how about this, Chief? You step outside and let 99 and Fang get in here with me.”

“Max, if I were outside, how could I tell you about the case?”

“You could shout.”

“Then what’s the point of having the cone of silence?”

Max lifted his eyes toward the ceiling. “Raise the Cone of Silence!” he called.

Magically, the plastic bubble ascended and disappeared into the ceiling.

“Did we miss anything?” 99 asked.

“Technical stuff—it would have been over your head, anyway,” Max replied.

“Max,” the Chief said from his seat at his desk, “can we get down to business? You know, the fate of the whole civilized—”

Max winced. “Not again, Chief.”

“Sorry.”

Max seated himself on a corner of the Chief’s desk. “Until you get a really top-notch pussy cat case, let’s just refer to everything as routine,” he suggested.

“All right, Max. Now, here’s your assignment,” the Chief said, settling back in his chair. “A certain Dr. X has developed a serum that can make men invisible. One injection and—”

“Excuse me, Chief,” Max interrupted. “But . . . this Dr. X . . . is that his real name?”

“Yes,” the Chief nodded.

“Why do you ask, Max?” 99 said.

“I used to know a family of Xs,” Max replied. “Back in my old home town. Let’s see . . . there was Billy Joe X, and Fanny Rose X, and V. W. X.—I don’t know what his name was, he only used his initials—and Franklin Delano X . . . a whole family of Xs. I wonder if this Dr. X is any relation.”

“I don’t see that it makes much difference, Max,” the Chief said.

“It could be a conversation-starter—having the same home town,” Max pointed out. “I hate like the devil to get involved in a contest of wills with a Bad Guy—especially in a situation where the fate of the whole civilized world hangs in the balance—and not have anything to talk about.”

The Chief sighed. “All right, Max. Let’s get on with it. As I was saying, Dr. X has developed a serum that can make men invisible. One injection and—”

“Chief—are you *sure* that this serum can make men invisible?”

“Well . . . that’s what Dr. X claims,” the Chief replied. “So far, he’s tried it only on guinea pigs. But the assumption is that, yes, it *can* make men invisible.”

“Chief . . . ahhh . . . did you *see* these pigs?”

“Well, no . . . they were invisible.”

Max looked thoughtful for a second, then he said, “Well, I guess that proves it, all right. I was a little doubtful there for a moment, but as long as you actually didn’t see the pigs, then I guess there’s no doubt about it. Go on, Chief.”

“Our first contact with Dr. X—if it can be called that—occurred about a week ago,” the Chief continued. “We received a package in the mail, and when we opened it, it contained what appeared to be an empty suitcase. But there was a note attached. The note explained that Dr. X had developed a serum that could make men invisible, and that he was including in the suitcase six invisible guinea pigs to prove it.”

Max nodded. “Ah-hah!”

“Well, we were a little skeptical at first,” the Chief went on. “But then somebody suggested that somebody reach into the suitcase and squeeze. And . . . somebody did . . . and . . . well . . . something squealed.”

“Guinea pigs!” Max exclaimed.

“Right.”

“What else did the note say, Chief?” 99 asked.

“Dr. X offered to sell us the formula for the serum. We were to put a million dollars in the suitcase and mail it to him at the return address on the package.”

“Well?” Max said.

The Chief lowered his eyes. “As you know, Max, we’re on an economy kick around here. Our allocation for buying invisible-man-serums is only five-hundred thousand dollars. We just couldn’t meet the price. So, we mailed the suitcase back to Dr. X, with a note of our own offering to bargain.”

“Yes . . . and what happened.”

“We got another note from him—this time in a plain envelope,” the Chief said. “He was rather nasty about it.”

“What exactly did he say, Chief?”

“For one thing, he said ‘Fooey on you!’ ”

Max flinched. “Oh, that is nasty.”

“But he also said something else,” the Chief continued. “He informed us that he plans to sell the formula and the serum to KAOS.”

Max’s eyes opened wide in stark horror. “KAOS! That international organization of No-good-niks! Chief, that’s terrible! KAOS will use that serum for purposes of evil!”

“Exactly, Max,” the Chief said, rising. “That’s why Dr. X has to be stopped and the formula has to be destroyed.” He began pacing the room. “Through clever undercover work,” he said, “we have discovered the next step in Dr. X’s plan.”

“How did you do that, Chief?” 99 asked.

“Well, since we had his return address, we knew where he lived. So, we secreted an agent into his house. The agent had himself bronzed and delivered to the house as a statue. Dr. X, of course, thought the delivery was a mistake. But, being only human, he kept the statue, anyway. Which was exactly what our man had counted on.”

“Brilliant,” Max said.

“Yes. Anyway, our man has advised us that Dr. X is sailing tomorrow for Europe. He intends to go to KAOS International headquarters and turn over the formula and the serum.”

“Chief, why don’t we stop him now—before he sails?” 99 asked.

“That’s not possible,” the Chief replied. “He has eluded our surveillance.”

“Pardon?” Max said.

“Rorff!” Fang barked.

Max looked surprised. "Oh, is that what it means? That he's slipped away from our undercover man? I thought surveillance was some sort of exotic mushroom. You can imagine my surprise when I thought you said that Dr. X had eluded our mushroom."

"Yes, Max."

"It didn't make sense."

"Yes, Max."

"How, exactly, did Dr. X elude our surveillance, Chief?"

"He disguised himself and slipped out of the house."

"Disguised himself as what, Chief?"

"If we knew that, Max, he wouldn't have eluded our surveillance."

Max nodded. "Finally, something makes sense."

"In other words, Chief," 99 said, "we don't know what this Dr. X will look like. How will we know him when we see him?"

"You will have one thing to go on," the Chief replied. "He will be the only man on board the ocean liner who is carrying a suitcase that contains six invisible guinea pigs."

"That ought to be easy to spot," Max said.

"Chief," 99 said, "do I understand that Max and I and Fang will be sailing on the ocean liner, too?"

"I don't know—is that what you understand?" the Chief said.

99 nodded. "Yes."

"Then you're absolutely right," the Chief said. "You and Max and Fang will be sailing on the ocean liner, too." He reached into a pocket and brought out a small envelope. "Here are your tickets," he said. "You're sailing tomorrow at noon on the 'Queen Edward.' "

Max squinted at him. "The 'Queen *Edward*,' Chief?"

"That's the name of the ocean liner, Max."

"Yes, I understand that. But, the 'Queen *Edward*?' "

"Her father, the King, wanted a son," the Chief explained.

"Oh."

"There's one other thing," the Chief said. "There will be a group of touring scientists on board. They're going to Europe to see the laboratories. Dr. X, using an assumed name, has infiltrated this group. He—"

"Chief . . . infiltrated . . . isn't that some sort of exotic—"

"No, Max, it isn't a mushroom. It means that he has sneaked in among them."

"It does make a lot more sense that way," Max admitted.

"In order to cloak his true identity," the Chief went on, "Dr. X has joined this group of touring scientists. So, we have executed a counter maneuver, Max, by infiltrating you into the group, too."

"I see. I will be posing as a scientist."

"Right. More specifically, you'll be posing as a space scientist. I've obtained a book on space science. You can read it—sometime between now and tomorrow noon—so that you'll be able to discuss the subject if anyone should challenge you."

"Good thinking, Chief. It will give me something to do this evening—after I finish packing, of course."

The Chief turned to 99. "99," he said, "you will be traveling as Max's assistant. So, it might be a good idea for you to leaf through the book, too."

"Rorff!" Fang barked.

"No, Fang, you won't have to read the book," the Chief replied. "You will be posing as a scientific experiment—a dog that Max intends to send into space."

"Rorff! Rorff!" Fang barked.

"All right, if you're *really* interested, then *read* the book," the Chief said.

"You're next after me, Fang," 99 said.

"Rorff!" Fang barked.

"That's a good idea," Max said. "Since Fang doesn't have any packing to do, he can read the book and then give 99 and me the gist of it. That will save time."

"Well, work it out however you want to," the Chief said. "Just don't miss the boat."

Max hopped down from his seat on the corner of the Chief's desk. "Is that all, Chief?"

"Yes. Oh . . . no," the Chief said. "One other thing."

He went behind his desk and got an attache case from beneath it. "Our Research and Development Department has come up with some new counter-belligerence tools it wants you to test on this mission, Max."

"Counter-belligerence tools?" Max said puzzledly. "That couldn't be —"

"No, not mushrooms. Gadgets." He opened the attache case. "Let's see . . . here's a beam-less flashlight. As I understand it, it throws a beam of ultraviolet light—which, of course, cannot be seen by the

naked eye. The advantage is that you can make a secret search at night without having to worry about your light being observed.”

“Excellent!” Max said. “What else is in there, Chief?”

“Oh, oodles of stuff,” the Chief said, closing the attache case. “Each of the gadgets is labeled, telling you what it can be used for. You can apply each one as the need for it arises. It will be a big help to the Research and Development Department. And, that way, even if you don’t catch Dr. X and destroy the formula, the trip won’t be a total loss.”

“Chief, you can count on us,” Max said, picking up the attache case. “We’ll probably have this case wrapped up before we’re a day at sea.”

“Then we can just relax and enjoy the cruise,” 99 said happily.

“Rorff!” Fang barked.

“Don’t be a spoil sport,” Max said. “Just because they won’t let dogs sit in the deck chairs that doesn’t mean there won’t be a lot of other things you can do.”

“Max . . . keep in touch,” the Chief said.

“I’ll try,” Max said. “Of course, when we get out into the middle of the ocean, that may be difficult. I’m not sure my shoe will carry this far.”

“Try, anyway,” the Chief said. He waved as the trio departed. “*Bon voyage!*”

Max paused. “Chief, is *that*, by any chance, some sort of exotic—”

The Chief interrupted the question, raising his eyes toward the ceiling. “Lower the Cone of Silence!” he begged.

Max quietly closed the door.

## 2.

MAX, 99 and Fang arrived at the dock in a taxi a little before noon the next day. A porter took their luggage—except for the attache case, which Max retained—and they boarded the “Queen Edward,” and got in line with the other passengers who were having their tickets inspected.

“So far, so good,” Max said smugly.

“Max, we’ve only been on board a few seconds,” 99 pointed out.

“The statement still stands—so far, so good,” Max insisted.

99 peered along the line of passengers. “Do you see anyone who might be Dr. X?” she said.

He’s a scientist—he’ll be wearing a beard,” Max replied. “Do you see any beards?”

99 began counting. “Five . . . six . . . seven . . .”

“Let me put it another way—do you see any *men* with beards?”

“. . . thirteen . . . fourteen . . . fifteen . . .”

Max shrugged. “All right, knock it off. I’ll grant you—that may not be our best clue.”

A few minutes later, they reached the ship’s officer, who, seated at a desk, was inspecting tickets.

“Let’s see,” Max said, patting his pockets, “tickets . . . tickets . . . I had the tickets right here just a second ago.”

“Rorff!” Fang barked.

“Yes, that’s right,” Max said, “I did put them in the attache case.”

He placed the case on the desk and opened it. “Let’s see now,” he muttered, “tickets . . . tickets . . .”

“You’re holding up the line,” the officer complained.

“What kind of a ‘welcome aboard’ is that?” Max grumbled. “I’ve got the tickets right here . . . tickets . . . tickets . . .”

“Could they be in that envelope?” 99 said, pointing.

Max picked up the envelope and read from the tag that was attached to it. “ ‘Envelope for mailing plea for HELP when all other means of communication destroyed.’ ” He turned to 99. “Research and Development thinks of everything,” he said. “It even has a Special

Delivery stamp on it.”

“Rorff!” Fang barked.

“I guess you’re right,” Max said. “It isn’t such a good idea. Special Delivery *does* take longer.” He began pawing in the attache case again. “Tickets . . . tickets . . .”

“There they are, Max,” 99 said.

“Oh, yes! They slipped into this little opening here.”

“What is that, Max?”

“That’s the little place where you stick your finger in to open the secret compartment,” Max explained. “Without that little finger-hole, you’d never be able to find it.” He handed the tickets to the ship’s officer. “There you are, Admiral. Two staterooms on Deck C.”

The officer counted Max and 99 and Fang. “One—two—three. That’s three,” he said.

“The mutt and I are bunking together,” Max explained. “We’re on a bit of an economy kick back at the office.”

The officer handed back the tickets and pointed. “Gangway that way,” he said.

“Gangway? We’re in no hurry,” Max said. “We’ll just toddle, if you don’t mind.”

“He means the stairway is that way,” 99 explained.

“Oh.” He scowled. “I thought the stairway was called the ladder on a ship.”

“It probably is,” the officer said. “I never learned much seafaring talk. I specialized in ticket-taking.”

Bumped from behind by an impatient passenger, the trio moved on.

“Gee, Deck C—that must be pretty close to the top,” 99 said enthusiastically. “I think there’s A Deck, then B Deck, then C Deck. That’s pretty luxurious—considering that Control is on an economy kick.”

“First Class, all the way,” Max said. “Control may not pay well, but the fringe benefits make up for it.”

“Oh . . . here’s the gangway . . . or ladder . . .” 99 said. “See, it says ‘stairway’ above it.”

They started the descent down the stairs, with Max leading and 99 and Fang following, in that order.

“We were on A Deck,” 99 said. “So B Deck must be the next one, and then C Deck will be next.”

But when they reached the next deck it was marked “A-1”.

“Well, the next deck must be B Deck,” 99 said.

But the next deck down was “A-2”.

“As I calculate it,” Max said, “C Deck will be three decks lower than a submarine.”

They continued downward, past decks A-3, A-4, A-5, B, B-1, B-2, B-3, B-4, B-5, until they finally reached C Deck.

“The breathing is a little touch-and-go down here,” Max panted. “I wonder how far below sea level we are?”

“I don’t know,” 99 said. “But one thing—*don’t open a porthole!*”

They walked along the corridor, checking stateroom numbers, until finally they found their own.

“Isn’t that cozy,” 99 said. “We’re side by side. You and Fang have Stateroom C-12, and I have Stateroom C-13.” She pushed on the door of her stateroom. But it opened only a crack. “There must be something against it,” she said.

“Let me put this attache case in my own room, then I’ll help you,” Max said. He pushed open his own door and peered into the room. “I think I know what it is that’s against your door,” he said. “I think it’s the opposite wall.”

99 stood on tip-toe and looked over his shoulder. “It is little, isn’t it?” she said sadly.

“Well . . . it’s bigger than a breadbox—but that’s about all I can say for it,” Max replied. He stepped into the room. “Come on in.”

Fang trotted in after him.

“You, too, 99,” he said.

“If I do,” she said, “I’ll be riding Fang bareback.”

Max looked back over his shoulder. “Oh, yes, I see. With Fang and me in here, there isn’t any room for anyone else.”

“There isn’t even room for you and Fang,” 99 said. “His tail hangs out.”

“He can sleep in the corridor and keep watch,” Max said.

“Rorff!”

“All right, all right, we’ll take turns. But, right now, let’s see what we can do about getting 99’s door open.”

Fang backed out, and Max emerged behind him—or in front of him.

Max put his weight against the door of 99’s stateroom. But it refused to budge. “I think I see what the trouble is,” he said. “If your stateroom is like my stateroom, then the door to the bathroom is directly behind the entrance door. Except, of course, on the adjoining

wall. Which means that when the bathroom door is open, it's impossible to open the entrance door—because it strikes against the bathroom door. Do you see what I mean? In other words, if you're in the bathroom and someone opens the entrance door, you're stuck in the bathroom until whoever it is closes the entrance door so that you can open the bathroom door. Or, to put it another way—

"I think I understand, Max," 99 said. "But how will I get into my room?"

"Simple," Max said. "Go in and close the bathroom door, then— Oh, yes, I see that does make it difficult, doesn't it?"

"Rorff!" Fang barked.

"Excellent idea, Fang!" Max said. "Go to it!"

Fang squeezed in through the narrow opening. A moment later there was the sound of a door being closed inside the stateroom. Then the entrance door swung open, revealing Fang.

"Lucky you didn't close yourself into the bathroom," Max said to him. "If you had, we might have had to do without your valuable services on this mission. As I calculate it, once you go into a bathroom in one of these staterooms, there is no way out. Unless you escape by way of the drain."

"My luggage is here, Max," 99 reported from inside her room. "Is yours?"

"No, mine's in *my* stateroom," Max replied. "Why would it be in yours?"

"That's what I meant." She poked her head out. "I want to change. Then we better get started on our mission. What do we do first, Max?"

"According to the schedule the Chief acquired for me," Max replied, "there is a 'welcome aboard' party for the touring scientists on A Deck in half an hour. I think we ought to attend. If we keep a sharp eye out, we may be able to identify the diabolical Dr. X."

"See you in half an hour, Max," 99 said, closing her door.

Max went to his own stateroom. Pausing in the doorway, he said to Fang, "I want to change, too. So you take the first watch."

"Rorff!"

"Don't be difficult!" Max snapped. "That's utterly ridiculous! What could you change to?"

Fang growled peevishly. But then he accepted his fate and stretched out in the corridor.

"You might as well make your peace with the fact," Max said sympathetically. "You're a dog, and you're going to live a dog's life."

Then he closed the door.

A half-hour after the ‘welcome aboard’ party for the scientists was scheduled to begin, Max, 99 and Fang began the slow and laborious climb from C Deck to A Deck. They had decided to arrive late so that, in the crowd, they would not be especially noticed.

“When you’re working undercover, it’s always best not to be the first one to arrive at a party,” Max explained. “If you are, the host or hostess feels compelled to introduce you to every blessed soul who arrives after you. And, after a while, after remembering all those names, he or she gets a little groggy. And he or she is just liable to introduce you as Secret Agent such-and-such. There is nothing that will uncover an undercover as quickly as that!”

“But that couldn’t happen to us,” 99 said. “Nobody on board knows that we’re secret agents.”

“And let’s keep it that way,” Max said. “That’s why it’s important that we arrive late at the party. You see, when you’re working undercover— Oh, I explained that, didn’t I?”

However, when they reached the lounge where the party was to be held, they found it vacant, except for one young man in a ship’s uniform who was standing at the doorway. The young man welcomed them exuberantly.

“Where are the others?” Max asked.

“Oh, it’s too early,” the young man replied. “The party was only scheduled to begin forty-five minutes ago. No one wants to be the one to arrive first at a party, you know. So, it will be at least another half-hour before the others begin to arrive. But you’re here—so we can start.”

“Actually,” Max said, “we’re not here. We were just passing by, on our way to take a half-hour stroll on deck.” He motioned to 99 and Fang. “Come along. We’re a bit early for the party.”

“But you’re not early, you’re late,” the young man protested.

“Late, yes—but *early* late,” Max corrected. “We’ll come back when we can be *late* late like everyone else.”

They walked out onto the deck. The liner was moving smoothly through the water, and the Manhattan skyline could be clearly seen in the near distance.

“Isn’t it beautiful, Max?” 99 said, peering at the skyline.

“Yes, but I wouldn’t care to sit on it,” Max replied. “Not with all those spires sticking up.”

“Instead, let’s sit in the deck chairs,” 99 suggested. “I’m a little pooped after that climb from C Deck.”

"Excellent idea. And we can keep an eye out for the diabolical Dr. X."

Max, 99 and Fang each settled in a deck chair. But the instant they were seated, a steward appeared. "Dogs aren't allowed in the deck chairs," he said.

"This doesn't happen to be your ordinary, run-of-the-mill, everyday pooch," Max replied. "He has a ticket, so I think he's entitled to occupy a deck chair."

"The rule is: No Dogs in Chairs," the steward insisted.

"Not even a secret agent dog?" Max snapped.

The steward peered at Fang. "That overgrown woolly worm is a secret agent? I can hardly believe that!"

Max looked thoughtful for a second, then said, "Would you believe that he's a typist in the steno pool for the F.B.I.?"

The steward shook his head. "Hardly."

"Then how about this?" Max said. "Would you believe that he once shed his hair on the couch in the outer office of the Director of the C.I.A.?"

"*That*, I'd believe," the steward said. "That's why he can't sit in that chair. We don't want him shedding his coat all over it. Out."

Max turned to Fang. "You heard the man. Out!"

Fang jumped out of the chair. "Rorff!" he barked.

"He's right," Max said to the steward. "When J. Edgar Hoover hears about this, *you* are in hot water!"

The steward rolled his eyes heavenward, then walked off.

"Max, we're not accomplishing anything here," 99 said. "Let's see if the party has started yet."

"Just what I was going to suggest," Max replied.

They returned to the lounge. Approaching it, they heard sounds of laughter and happy-talk.

"The party has started, all right," Max said. "It sounds as if we're just in time—the last ones to arrive."

"Max, since we don't know what Dr. X looks like, what shall we look for?" 99 said.

"Well . . . we know that he has disguised himself. And, what is the first thing a man does when he wants to hide his true identity? He puts on a false beard."

"I see. So we look for a scientist with a false beard."

"You phrase that very well, 99."

They reached the entrance to the lounge—and halted. The room was chock-a-block with happy, smiling scientists. They were toasting each other, babbling away in scientific jargon, laughing and joking—all in all, having a thoroughly enjoyable time of it.

“Max . . .” 99 said thinly.

“Yes?”

“Do you notice something?”

“Yes. It’s very odd, isn’t it?”

“It certainly is,” 99 agreed.

“This is undoubtedly the first time I’ve ever seen a man drinking a milk shake with an olive in it,” Max said.

“An olive? Where?”

“Over there—the fellow with the beard.”

“Oh . . . yes. But, Max, that wasn’t what I meant. What I meant was—they’re *all* wearing beards!”

Max glanced around. “99, I think you’re right.”

“What do you mean, you think I’m right. *They’re all wearing beards!*”

“Let me put that another way: 99, you’re right.”

99 sighed. “It isn’t much help, is it?”

“Well, it does make our project a little more difficult,” Max replied. “But not impossible. One of those beards is a false beard. What we have to do is find it.”

“How? Pull every beard in the room? And suppose the diabolical Dr. X *isn’t* wearing a false beard? If all these other scientists are wearing real beards, maybe he is, too.”

Max scowled. “99, I think this calls for a change in tactics. Let’s assume that the real Dr. X, being a scientist, *does* wear a beard. Now, if you were in his shoes, and wanted to disguise yourself, what would you do?”

“Go barefoot?”

“Let’s stick to beards. If you had a beard and wanted to disguise yourself, what would you do?”

“Oh, I see. I’d shave it off.”

“Exactly. So what we’re looking for is a clean-shaven scientist.”

99 looked around again. “I don’t see any clean-shaven scientists.”

“Mark my word, 99. The diabolical Dr. X is here, and he is clean-shaven. Now, all we have to do is find him. And, to do that, all we have to do is mingle. Sooner or later, we’ll come across a clean-shaven scientist.” He motioned to 99 and Fang. “Let’s mingle.”

“Rorfff!” Fang barked.

“I know, I know,” Max said. “I’m as bored by these parties as you are. Just don’t join in the conversation if it pains you so much. No one will expect you to have opinions, anyway.”

Max, followed by 99 and Fang, sidled up to two scientists who were in jolly conversation.

“Which reminds me of a funny story,” he said, breaking in. “A bunch of the other space scientists and I were sitting around the launch pad one day, discussing the moon and what sort of animal we ought to send on the first trip to that planet—It is a planet, isn’t it? Or is it an asteroid or something? Well, no matter. The point is, we were discussing the moon and animals. Well, one of the space scientists said, ‘You know, I wouldn’t be surprised to find out that the moon is really made of green cheese.’ That got quite a chuckle, of course. But then I topped it. I said, ‘Well, if it is, then there’s no question about what animal we should send to the moon. We ought to send a duck.’ ‘A duck?’ the other space scientists queried. ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘a duck. That way, when the first man gets to the moon, he’ll have a quacker to go along with the green cheese.’ Well, you should have heard the howls!”

The two scientists stared at Max dumbly.

“Quackers and cheese,” Max said.

The two scientists looked at each other.

“A duck makes a quacking sound, you see,” Max explained. “Consequently, I referred to the duck as a ‘quacker’. If you think about it, it’s quite funny.”

One of the scientists groaned softly. The other one closed his eyes, as if wanting to be alone.

“The boys on the launching pad liked it,” Max muttered.

“I think we better mingle some more, Max,” 99 said.

“Yes . . .”

They moved on.

“We were wasting our time there, anyway,” Max said. “Both of those scientists were wearing beards.”

“Max . . . 99 said sympathetically, “. . . I thought that was a very funny story.”

“Thank you, 99.”

“There was just one thing, though. The part I didn’t understand was, why would anybody want to send a duck to the moon?”

“Well, you see—” He stopped and glared at her.

99 lowered her eyes. “Sorry about that, Max.”

Max cocked an ear toward a nearby conversation. "Ah . . . serious stuff, scientific talk," he said. "This, we can get in on without fear of being rebuffed. Where we made our mistake before was in not remembering that, as a group, scientists have no sense of humor."

Max ambled up to the trio of scientists on whom he had been eavesdropping.

". . . centrifugal flow of ions," the scientist on the left was saying.

"Exactly what I was saying the other day to the boys on the launching pad," Max interjected.

The three turned to him.

"Oh, excuse me," Max said. "I'm Max Smart, Space Scientist. And this is my assistant, 99. And my current experiment, Fang. I expect to send him to the moon any day now."

"Rorff!" Fang barked.

"You'll eat cheese and quackers and like it!" Max snapped.

"Ah . . . space science," the scientist on the right said, "a fascinating subject."

"Yes," Max agreed. "And the most interesting thing is, there's so much of it. Space, that is. It's probably never occurred to you, but space, you know, is all around us. Most people don't think much about that. They take it for granted. Space, that is. As a scientist, however, I appreciate that. Whenever I want to study a little space, all I have to do is open a window, and there it is. Space. That makes it quite convenient for me. I don't have to send out for it, and wait for the delivery truck to arrive."

"Yes, that's an advantage we pathologists don't have," the scientist in the middle said.

Max nodded. "I have noticed an acute shortage of paths," he said.

"No, no," the scientist smiled. "A pathologist is a medical doctor who makes a study of cadavers."

Max squinted at him. "Mushrooms?"

"Cadavers are dead bodies."

"Oh. Yes, now that you mention it, I have noticed an acute shortage of dead bodies. But . . . things will pick up, I'm sure. One little epidemic, and your problem will be solved."

The pathologist sighed. "It's too much to hope for," he said. "Doctors today have no regard for science. An epidemic starts, and, right away, they rush in and stop it." He sighed again, more deeply. "It's not like the old days."

"For that matter, what is?" Max sympathized. "There's the story of

Wilbur and Orville Wright, you know, when they still had that bicycle shop, before they even thought about inventing the airplane. One day, one of their customers said to Orville, ‘Wilbur,’ he said, ‘one of these days, man is going to fly to the moon—what do you think of that?’ Well, Orville—or Wilbur, as the case may be—looked at the customer for a moment, then, very dramatically, he said, ‘Hand me that socket wrench, will you?’ ”

The scientists stared at Max dumbly.

“He was putting a wheel on a bicycle,” Max explained.

One of the scientists groaned softly. Another closed his eyes, as if he wanted to be alone. The third scientist left to freshen up his milk shake.

“After he put the wheel on, he attached a basket to the handlebars,” Max said. “Bicycles were used as beasts of burden in those days.”

“I think we better mingle some more, Max,” 99 said.

“Yes . . .”

### 3.

AS THEY moved away from the two scientists, 99 suddenly clutched Max's arm. "Max! Look! Over there! Across the room! A clean-shaven scientist!"

But Max refused to look. "I've been rebuffed enough for one day," he pouted. "No more scientists."

"But, Max! Clean-shaven!"

Max ventured a peek. "HMMMMM. You're right, 99. And, he looks like a good-natured sort, too. Well, all right, we'll approach him. But he better be in better humor than the other scientists we've tackled today. One more icy stare, and I'm going to my stateroom and hide my head and not come out until I get a written apology—in triplicate!"

"Max, don't be so sensitive."

"A secret agent has feelings, too, you know."

"But you're supposed to hide them, Max."

"That's what I intended to do—under a pillow, and not come out until I got a written apology—in triplicate."

"Look, Max! The clean-shaven scientist! He's laughing! You'll like him!"

Max stared at her icily. "99, a secret agent can't pick and choose. A secret agent has to go anywhere, and meet anybody, and like it. A secret agent can't afford to have feelings."

"All right, Max."

Slowly, inconspicuously, Max, 99 and Fang made their way toward the clean-shaven scientist, who was in conversation with another of the bearded scientists.

When they neared them, the clean-shaven scientist extended a hand to Max, smiling jovially. "Hello there," he said. "I saw you slowly making your way in this direction. I'm Herbert Wai—pronounced 'Y'."

"Mr. 'Y'?" Max said, taken aback for a moment.

"Yes, 'Y'—as in 'Yellow young yoga in Yankeeland'."

Max's eyes narrowed. "Or as in 'X'?"

"I don't follow you," Mr. Wai replied.

“No, but ‘Y’ does follow ‘X’—which strikes me as being somewhat suspicious.”

“On the other hand,” Mr. Wai smiled, “‘X’ is also followed by ‘Z’.”

Max’s jaw fell. “Yes, I guess that clears you, all right,” he said. “Apparently, it’s all in the way you look at it. I’m sorry I jumped to the wrong conclusion.”

“It could happen to anybody,” Mr. Wai assured Max. The smile spread out over his face again. “I don’t believe I caught your name,” he said.

Max introduced himself and 99 and Fang. “Are you a scientist, too?” he asked.

“Oh, no,” Mr. Wai replied. “Didn’t you notice—I’m clean-shaven. Scientists have beards. No, I’m the tour director. I’m escorting all you scientists to Europe to see the laboratories.” He suddenly frowned. “If you’re one of our scientists,” he said, “how is it that you’re clean-shaven, too?”

“Oh . . . yes. Well, there’s an explanation for that,” Max replied. “You see, I’m . . . ah . . . ah . . .”

“Rorff!”

“Yes, that’s it!” Max brightened. “I’m traveling incognito.”

Mr. Wai peered at him puzzledly. “You’re traveling as a mushroom?”

“Fang!” Max snapped at K-13.

“Rorff!”

“Oh, *that’s* what it means!” Max said, relieved. He turned back to Mr. Wai. “No, you see, incognito means that I’m concealing my true identity.”

“Well, maybe so,” Mr. Wai said doubtfully. “But I don’t think it’s working. I’d never take you for a mushroom.”

“Would you take me for a space scientist?” Max suggested.

“Yes.”

“Then let’s settle for that,” Max said.

“Fine, fine,” Mr. Wai nodded. “And, how are you enjoying the tour—so far?”

“Well, frankly, I’ve had better times at automobile accidents,” Max said. “I find that my colleagues are severely lacking in an appreciation of the finer degrees of humor.”

“I agree,” Mr. Wai said. “A bunch of point-killers if I ever saw a bunch of point-killers.” He suddenly grinned. “But, say, I did hear a

good one today. As a space scientist, you might enjoy it. It seems that a bunch of these space scientists were sitting around the launching pad, discussing what animal they ought to send to the moon, and one of these space scientists said—

“Cheese and quackers,” Max broke in.

“Oh. You’ve heard it.”

“Yes, I’ve heard it,” Max said. “But, have you heard the one about Orville and Wilbur Wright?”

“Hand me that socket wrench?” Mr. Wai replied.

“That’s it,” Max nodded.

Mr. Wai extended a hand again. “Well, I have to mingle with the other scientists,” he said. “But it’s been fun.”

“Yes, we’ll have to get together and trade punchlines again,” Max said.

Mr. Wai ambled off.

“Max,” 99 said, “I’m not so sure about him.”

“Innocent as a new-born-babe,” Max said.

“I don’t know—his name, Mr. ‘Y’. That’s awfully close to Dr. X.”

“Mr. Wai couldn’t possibly be a scientist,” Max said. “With a highly developed sense of humor like that? Impossible.”

“All right, Max. If you say so. Shall we mingle some more?”

Max shook his head. “No. We’re getting nowhere here. We’ve checked out the only clean-shaven man at the party, and found that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, he isn’t Dr. X. So, the only conclusion I can reach is that Dr. X is not present. I think it’s time to change tactics again, 99.”

“What now, Max?”

“Let’s step outside where we can have some privacy,” Max said. “We don’t want to be overheard.”

“Max, no one is paying any attention to us.”

“That’s another reason for getting out of here,” Max said, leading the way toward the exit.

Max, 99 and Fang went out on deck and stood by the rail.

“I think we’re safe here,” Max said. A sea gull swooped by. “Unless that sea gull is bugged,” he added. “But we’ll just have to take that chance.”

“What do you have in mind, Max?” 99 said.

"In a nutshell, this," Max said. "Now, we know that the diabolical Dr. X is traveling with a suitcase of six invisible guinea pigs—right? Right. And, it stands to reason that the suitcase is in Dr. X's stateroom—right? Right. So, the next logical step, it seems to me, would be to search the staterooms of each and every one of the scientists on board until we find the suitcase full of invisible guinea pigs."

"Max—that's brilliant!"

"Simple logic," Max said modestly.

"That means that we'll need a list of the staterooms that have been assigned to scientists," 99 said.

"Right. Now, armed with this list—"

"Where will we get the list, Max?"

"From the officer in charge of lists, of course. Where else?"

"I'd like to see that. Max."

"You will, 99. Because that is *your* assignment."

"Why me, Max?"

"Because, in this instance, I think your femininity will be more effective than my intellectuality. You know how sailors are. There's something about being at sea that makes them especially susceptible to the lures of romance. Though, for the life of me, I can't fathom what it could be."

"Salt air, maybe," 99 suggested.

"Rorff!" Fang barked.

Max glared at him. "It couldn't be that," he said. "And I think it's ungentlemanly of you even to suggest it."

"All right, Max," 99 said, "what do I do after I get the list?"

"Try to shake the sailor," Max said. "Then come to my stateroom. Fang and I will be there. I want to inspect that attache case of gadgets that the Chief gave us. There might be a gadget in there that we can use to help us search the scientists' staterooms."

99 saluted. "See you later, Max."

"Don't make it *too* much later," Max said. "Fang may be right about what makes sailors that way."

When 99 had gone, Max turned to Fang. "Time to hit that long, long trail—back to C Deck, boy," he said. "Are you up to it?"

"Rorff!"

"Yes, I guess 'down to it' is closer to the mark."

"Rorff!"

"No, Fang, I will not go down and get the attache case and bring it

up here.”

“Rorff!”

“Go on. See what good it does you. J. Edgar Hoover is just as good a friend of *mine* as he is of *yours*.”

Fang capitulated. And they began the long trek downward to C Deck.

When they reached the stateroom, they both squeezed in.

“Just watch your elbows,” Max said gruffly.

“Rorff!”

“All right, then, whatever it is that you have that passes for elbows.”

Max opened the attache case on the lower bunk and peered thoughtfully at the contents. “Let’s see, we’ll do our searching at night, when it’s dark,” he said, “so this ultra-violet flashlight, which throws a beam that can’t be seen by the naked eye, will come in handy. We can search the staterooms without having to worry about our beam being seen from outside. Clever of Research and Development to come up with that.”

“Rorff!”

Max picked up another of the gadgets. “Oh, this? Well, let’s see. I’ll read what it says here on the tag. ‘Full Field Pack, Including Food Rations to Sustain a Party of Six Over a Period of Two Weeks (if lunches are skipped). Also Including Battery-Operated Electric Stove and Oven, Three Sauce Pans, One Roaster Pan, Two Skillets and a Meat Thermometer.’ ”

“Rorff!”

“Yes, that is amazing,” Max said, holding up the gadget. “Imagine getting all that into a capsule the size of this. Why, it’s not much bigger than a tube of lipstick.”

“Rorff!”

Max scowled. “That’s possible. Maybe they did attach the wrong label to it.”

“Rorff!”

“That’s even *more* possible,” Max admitted. “Maybe it is a tube of 99’s lipstick. I think I better check it out. I’ll just pull the top off and —”

There was a sudden WHOOSH! The capsule exploded, and large, small and medium-sized objects filled the air, then settled down on Max and Fang, burying them.

They clawed their way to the surface.

“Fang! Are you all right!”

“rurff.”

“Oh, there you are. Take your head out of the oven.”

Max struggled to his feet, then, disgusted, stared down at the rubble of food containers and cooking utensils. “Look at that!” he said. “Fourteen boxes of instant oatmeal! Is that what they call food rations! I wouldn’t feed that gunk to a dog!”

“Rorff!”

“Sorry, Fang. I didn’t mean that personally.” He groaned. “Well, let’s get this stateroom straightened up. Shove everything under the bunk.”

When the rubble had been cleared away, Max and Fang turned their attentions to the attache case of gadgets once more.

Max plucked an item from the case that looked like a nozzle for a hose. “What do you suppose this is?” he said, curious.

“Rorff!”

“I *know* what it looks like. But it can’t be that. The thing about these gadgets is, they’re designed to look like something harmless to disguise the fact that, actually, they’re lethal weapons. Now then, let’s read this tag and see what this instrument *really* is.” He read—silently. “HMMMMMMMM,” he said, finally, “a nozzle, eh?”

“Rorff!”

“Fang, nobody likes an ‘I-told-you-so.’ ” He peered into the business end of the nozzle. “Very interesting. But highly impractical. What good is a nozzle without a hose? And, more to the point, what good is a nozzle without a hose that’s attached to a water hydrant? No, I’m afraid I’ll have to give Research and Development a thumbs down on this one.”

At that moment, 99 put her head in the doorway.

“Hi, Max. I’m back.”

“Welcome home,” Max said. “Did you get the list?”

“Oh, yes. I found the list officer and asked him for the list, but he said that lists were restricted, he couldn’t give any lists out to anybody who wasn’t authorized personnel.”

“That’s the usual story,” Max said. “What did you do?”

“I said, ‘All right, don’t give me the list, but may I have a copy of it?’ So that was okay, he gave me a carbon of the list. He said there wasn’t any rule about who could get copies.”

“Good, good. I’d ask you to bring the list in, 99, but there just isn’t room. So, do this. Make a paper airplane out of it and sail it over to me, will you?”

“All right, Max.”

99 began folding the list into the shape of a paper airplane, but then she stopped and looked at Max puzzledly.

“Max,” she said, “why are you standing there holding a nozzle?”

“Oh. This is one of the gadgets that Research and Development sent along in the attache case,” Max explained. He smiled. “Looks like a nozzle, doesn’t it?”

“Yes. What is it really?”

“It’s a nozzle.”

99 giggled. “Max, you’re kidding.”

“No. No, I’m not. It’s really a nozzle.”

“Let’s see. Squirt some water.”

Max looked pained. “99, you can’t squirt water out of a nozzle that doesn’t have a hose attached to it. That’s elementary logic.”

“Max, R and D wouldn’t have sent it if it didn’t work. Turn it on.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“Try it, Max.”

“I’d feel like a silly-Billy.”

“Oh, go on, Max. It won’t hurt.”

“Well . . .”

Max turned the nozzle. And a thunderous stream of water gushed from the end.

“Max! Turn it off!” 99 shrieked.

“I can’t! It’s stuck!”

The stream of water sprayed the stateroom. It knocked pictures off the walls. Fang became drenched. Max became drenched. 99 tried to fight her way into the stateroom to help Max, and she became drenched.

Water began to rise in the stateroom. A stove floated out from under the bunk.

“Max!” 99 called. “Open the porthole!”

Max dropped the nozzle, waded to the porthole, and yanked it open.

The sea came rolling in!

“Max!” 99 screamed. “I forgot how far down we are! Close the porthole!”

Max threw his weight against the porthole cover, and finally got it closed, shutting off the rush of sea water.

A grayish ooze began bubbling up from under the bunk!

“Max! What is that!” 99 wailed.

“That,” Max said disgustedly, “is fourteen boxes of instant oatmeal!”

“Max! Do something!”

“Close the door!” Max called back.

“Max, no! You’ll drown in there!”

“Close the door!” Max commanded. “I want to get this nozzle into the bathroom and put it in the sink. But I can’t open the bathroom door unless you close the stateroom door.”

“Oh. All right, Max.”

99 tried to close the stateroom door. But she didn’t have much success.

“99—what’s the matter!”

“It’s the oatmeal, Max. The doorway is so full of oatmeal, I can’t get the door closed.”

“All right—belay that last order.” Max turned to Fang. “Fang, I’m going to open the porthole once more. When I do, you throw the nozzle out the opening. Ready?”

“Rorff!”

“Fang, I don’t think this is the time to worry about whether you should throw it underhanded or overhanded. Just throw!”

“Rorff!”

“All right, underhanded, if that’s your best throw. And, yes, I promise I’ll watch.”

Again, Max yanked the porthole open.

Fang gripped the nozzle firmly in his jaws, then, with considerable skill, pitched it out the opening—underhanded.

Once more, Max pressed his full weight against the porthole cover. The sea yielded, and the cover closed.

Max sat down on the edge of the bunk, exhausted.

“Rorff!”

“Yes, Fang,” he said wearily, “I *do* think you’re good enough for the New York Mets.”

“Max . . . are you all right?” 99 said worriedly from the doorway.

“All right? Yes, I’m all right. Considering that my shoes are full of instant oatmeal.”

“You better get someone to clean up this mess, Max.”

“Yes, sure. And how will I explain it?”

“Well . . . there’s the stove, and the pans, and the oatmeal. You could say you were having breakfast in bed and it got out of hand.”

“99, that’s preposterous.”

“I don’t know why. There’s the stove and the pans and the oatmeal.”

“Oh, that part of it makes sense enough,” Max said. “But, 99, it’s the middle of the afternoon. Who would believe that I would be having breakfast at that time of day?”

99 nodded sadly. “I guess we’ll have to clean it up ourselves.”

It took only a few hours to clear away the mess in Max’s stateroom. By then it was time for dinner, but still too early to go stateroom-searching.

“Shall we eat now, Max?” 99 said.

“Mess,” Max replied.

“Max, why do we have to miss dinner?”

“Not ‘miss’, ‘mess.’ That’s what meals are called on board ship.”

99 looked at him dubiously. “Mess?”

“Yes. Mess.”

“Max, why do they call it that?”

“Well . . . you just saw what my breakfast looked like. Isn’t it obvious?”

“Oh . . . yes.”

“Rorff!” Fang barked.

“Yes, that’s right,” Max agreed. “The Chief did say that he wanted us to keep in touch. I think I’d better put in a call to Control before we go to mess.”

Max sat down on the edge of the lower bunk and took off his communicating shoe. He dialed, then waited, listening to the tone.

*Operator:* What number were you calling, please?

*Max* (surprised): Operator, this is a direct line. You’re not supposed to be on it.

*Operator:* This is an overseas call, sir. All overseas calls are handled by we operators.

*Max:* I think that should be ‘us’ operators, operator.

*Operator:* Oh? Are you one of we?

*Max:* Us.

*Operator:* Is that you, Mabel? What happened to your voice?

*Max:* Operator, this is not Mabel. This is Max.

*Operator:* Oh . . . Maxine! Gee, honey, you sounded just like Mabel. Golly, dearie, no wonder I didn't recognize your voice. I haven't seen you in ages. Not since you told that Night Supervisor what she could do with her trunk line. Did she resent that, Maxine? Is that why I haven't seen you around?

*Max* (testily): Operator, this is *not* Maxine. This is Max. M-a-x—Max. I am Maxwell Smart, Secret Agent 86, and I am trying to place a call to Control. Now, may I have your cooperation, please?

*Operator:* I'm sorry, sir. But, you know, you sure do sound like Mabel. Or Maxine, as the case may be. But, if you say you're not . . . if you say you're some kind of secret agent . . . I guess you have a right to that opinion. After all, it's a free country, isn't it, six? Now, what number do you want, sir?

*Max:* I can't tell you that, operator. Control is a secret organization. Consequently, its number is classified information.

*Operator:* But can't you even tell me, sir? I won't tell anybody, honest.

*Max:* I'm afraid not, operator. That would be a violation of my oath. You'll have to look it up yourself. It's right there in the book.

*Operator:* Yes, sir. And what did you say the name was?

*Max:* Control. C-o-n-t-r-o-l.

(sound of Operator leafing through pages)

*Operator:* I have the page, sir. Now, what is the first name?

*Max:* There isn't any first name, operator. It's just plain old Control.

*Operator* (to herself): Gee . . . let's see . . . here's Frank Control . . . Algernon Control . . . Pest Control . . . oh, here's a P. O. Control. Could that be it, sir?

*Max:* Yes, I suppose it is. P. O. Control. Plain Old Control. Let's try that number, anyway.

*Operator:* Yes, sir. I'm ringing that number, sir.

(ringing sound)

*Chief:* Control. Chief speaking.

*Max:* Chief, this is Max. I'm calling from the "Queen Edward." Just giving you a buzz to let you know that the mission is rolling right along on schedule.

*Chief:* Max, have you spotted the diabolical Dr. X yet?

*Max:* I'm almost positive we have, Chief. In our wanderings about the ship we've seen practically everybody on board. One of those persons must have been the diabolical Dr. X. Now, all we have to do is narrow it down to *the* one.

*Chief:* Well, I suppose that's better than nothing. What else have you accomplished?

*Max:* For one thing, Chief, I think I've found a new pitcher for the New York Mets. That is, if they're interested in an underhanded lefty. Oh, yes, and I've experience-tested a couple of those gadgets that R and D sent along. One thing, Chief: I think a warning should be attached to those boxes of instant oatmeal. It probably should say something like this: Do Not Open in Flooded Stateroom.

*Chief:* I'll make a note of that, Max. R and D is very anxious to get your reaction to those new gadgets.

*Max:* I have one little disappointment for them, Chief. I won't be bringing back that nozzle. I have an excellent reason for it. But it's a long, wet story, so I won't bore you with it.

*Chief:* They *will* be disappointed. That nozzle was one of their prize gadgets.

*Max:* Tell them I'm sorry about that, Chief.

*Chief:* What are your plans now, Max?

*Max:* Right now, Chief, we're going to mess.

*Chief:* Mess, Max?

*Max:* That's what meals are called on board ship, Chief.

*Chief:* Why is that?

*Max:* If you'd been here in my stateroom a few minutes ago, you wouldn't have to ask. But, I suppose it's because the ship's crew is an untidy lot, and they mess around a lot at meals.

*Operator* (breaking in): Your three minutes are up. Deposit another seventy-six dollars and twenty-five cents, please.

*Chief:* Operator, this isn't a pay phone. The charge goes on our regular bill.

*Operator:* Pardon my impudence, sir, but that's what they all say.

*Chief:* Max—I don't have that kind of change handy, so I guess we'll have to ring off now. But keep in touch.

*Max:* So long, Chief.

*Operator:* So long from me, too, Chief. And so long to you, Maxine.

The line went dead.

## 4.

MAX, 99 and Fang dined in the main dining room, then went out on the deck to wait for night to fall, at which time they intended to begin searching the scientists' staterooms.

As they stood at the rail, the sound of soft music floated in the air, wafted by a cooling, caressing, sea-scented breeze.

99 sighed dreamily. "Somewhere, Max, they're dancing," she murmured romantically.

"I hope so," Max replied. "It would be a shame to waste that music."

"Max—look. The stars are peeping through the clouds."

"Technically, that isn't correct, 99," Max said. "Those stars are just sitting there, and the clouds are passing in front of them. Stars don't peep. They're not interested in that sort of thing."

"Max, do you have to be so literal!"

"I'm not so literal," Max replied gruffly. "I'm five-foot-eleven. There are a lot of guys that are literal than that."

"Rorff!"

"Fang is right," Max said. "I just look literal to you because you're a tall girl."

"What I mean is, Max, don't you ever have any romantic thoughts? Look—the stars are out, the moon is a yellow gondola in the sky, the —"

"99," Max broke in, "if you think the moon looks like a gondola, you've got a lot of gondola research to do."

"Max, I was speaking poetically. The stars . . . the moon . . . the night . . . doesn't that mean something to you?"

"99, you're right. I've been a blind fool. Now, I understand what you've been trying to tell me. It's night—time to start searching those staterooms. Come on!"

99 groaned—then obediently trotted after Max and Fang, who were striding down the deck.

"We're going to do this alphabetically—from Z to A," Max said when 99 caught up.

"Isn't alphabetically the other way around, from A to Z?" 99 said.

“Not if you’re in a hurry, and you’re looking for a Dr. X,” Max replied.

They entered a corridor that was lined with the doors to staterooms. Max, leading the way, began checking the numbers on the doors.

“Whose stateroom are we looking for, Max?” 99 asked.

“The stateroom of a Dr. Zee,” Max replied. “Dr. Ludwig Zee.”

“Zee,” 99 mused. “Dr. Zee . . . that is suspicious, isn’t it, Max?”

Max halted. “How’s that?”

“Well . . . Dr. Zee . . . Dr. X . . . they’re so close together. You know, X, Y, Z.”

“Oh, is that how it goes? I thought it was ‘I’ before ‘E’, except after ‘C’, and, on rare occasions, ‘W’ and ‘Y’ ”

“That’s something else, Max, I’m talking about the alphabet—the way it ends. It ends with X, Y, Z.”

Max shook his head. “Sorry, 99. Good try, but it just doesn’t have it. You see, in this case, we’re working from Z to A. Consequently, the alphabet ends not in X, Y, Z, but in C, B, A. Nevertheless, as I said, good try. Keep thinking.”

“Yes, Max.”

They moved on—then Max halted again. “This is it,” he said.

He looked up and down the corridor.

“All clear,” 99 whispered.

Max tried the door. “Locked,” he announced.

“That’s not surprising,” 99 said.

“No, and not unexpected, either,” Max replied. “Fortunately, I’m prepared. R and D sent along a gadget that—it claims—is guaranteed to unlock *any* locked door. This looks to me like an excellent opportunity to experience-test it.” He reached into a pocket and extracted a tiny, penny-sized gadget, then read from the tag that was attached to it. “ ‘Turn Indicator to ON, place in Keyhole, Then Run Like the Devil!’ ”

“It must be an explosive,” 99 said.

Max scowled. “I’m not sure I can get this tag in that keyhole,” he said.

“Max, I think it means to put the gadget in the keyhole—not the tag.”

“Oh . . . yes. I wish R and D would be more explicit about these things.” He tore the tag from the gadget, then set the indicator on ON, and pushed the gadget into the keyhole.

“Now, then, to see what develops,” he said.

“Max, aren’t we supposed to run like the Devil?”

“See what I mean? Why can’t R and D be more explicit? I, for one, haven’t the faintest idea how a Devil runs. Is a Devil a slow runner, or a fast—”

The question was suddenly cut short by a thunderous explosion. There was a flash of flame, then black, roiling smoke filled the corridor.

“Well, I guess that answers that,” Max said, choking.

They fanned the smoke away—and found the stateroom door at their feet. They also found themselves joined by a number of other passengers.

“Don’t panic,” Max said to them. “Nothing to get excited about. We’re the ship’s carpenters—doing a little repair work. This, uh, door was stuck.”

The other passengers seemed satisfied. They returned to their staterooms.

“That was close,” Max said.

“You handled it beautifully, Max,” 99 complimented him.

“Yes, I thought so. The secret is to keep your wits about you and present a logical, wholly believable explanation. It works every time.” He gestured toward the open doorway. “After you, 99 . . . Fang.”

The two entered, then Max raised the door and leaned it in place in front of the opening.

“Now, then . . .” he said, pleased.

“Max . . .” 99 called from inside the stateroom, “. . . you closed yourself outside. You’re in the corridor.”

Max looked around. “I thought this was an odd shape for a stateroom—long and narrow,” he said. “And very poorly furnished, too.”

He lifted the door aside, entered the stateroom, then put the door back in place.

“Now, then . . .” he said again.

“Max, it’s dark in here.”

“Exactly why I brought along the ultra-violet flashlight, 99. Here it is. I’ll just turn on the beam, and . . .”

“Max, it’s still dark.”

“That’s because the ultra-violet beam cannot be seen by the naked eye, 99. And, you and I and Fang, being only human, are equipped

with naked eyes.”

“But, Max, what good is it if we can’t see the beam? There isn’t any light.”

“Yes, I better make a note of that for R and D,” Max said. “99, will you flip on the light switch, please. I can’t write in the dark.”

“Yes, Max.”

Light flooded the room.

“That’s better,” Max said, making the note to pass on to R and D.

“Where shall we start searching, Max?” 99 asked.

“The suitcases,” Max replied. “That’s what we’re looking for, remember? A suitcase containing six invisible guinea pigs. Not three, not four, not five, but *six* invisible guinea pigs. However, if you do find a suitcase with *five* invisible guinea pigs in it, you better let me know. It’s just possible that one of the little beggars might have escaped.”

“It will be difficult to know,” 99 said. “Since it would be invisible.”

“That’s why I’m here,” Max said. “To make those difficult decisions for you. All right, 99, let’s start the search.”

99 opened the closet door and pulled out a suitcase.

Max kneeled and peered under the bunk.

“Rorff!” Fang barked.

“No, nothing but dust,” Max reported.

“Max! I’ve found them!” 99 cried.

Max leaped to his feet and rushed to her side. He peered into the suitcase that lay open on the floor.

“Empty as Mother Hubbard’s cupboard!” he said. “This just might be it, 99!”

“How can we be sure?”

“By feel. That’s the only way.”

Max reached a hand into the empty suitcase and squeezed.

But there was no response.

Max sighed. “No, 99, I’m afraid that’s not it. Until we find an empty suitcase that squeals, we’ll just have to keep looking.”

“Sorry, Max,” 99 said, closing the suitcase.

“It could happen to anybody.”

99 took another suitcase from the closet.

Max kneeled again and, this time, peered under the chest of drawers.

“Rorff!”

“Same old dust,” Max reported.

At that moment, another voice was heard—a challenging, guttural, masculine voice.

“Vot you doink in mine staderoom?”

99 turned. Max looked up. Fang ducked under the bed.

A large, dark man with a long dark beard was standing in the doorway. The door was nowhere to be seen.

“Hi, there,” Max said cheerily, getting to his feet. “Dr. Zee, I presume.”

“Vot you doink in mine staderoom?” Dr. Zee repeated, a touch more belligerently.

Max’s eyes narrowed. “Perhaps I should have said, ‘Dr. X, I presume,’” he said. “That is your true identity, isn’t it, Doctor?”

“Vot you doink in mine staderoom?” the man persisted.

“That’s right, play it cool,” Max snapped. “But it won’t wash, Doctor. It so happens that we’re on to you. So, just hand over that formula, and, I might add, those half-dozen invisible guinea pigs, and let’s get this over with.”

The man glared at him. “Vot you doink in mine staderoom?”

“Pret-ty clever,” Max said. “Won’t give us anything but your name, rank and serial number, eh? It just so happens, however, that this case is not covered by the Geneva Convention. There are no rules in the game of espionage, Doctor. It’s every man for himself.”

“Rorff!”

“Dogs, too,” Max added. “And come out from under that bunk!”

The man tried once more. “Vot you doink in mine staderoom?”

“So, that’s your story, and you’re going to stick to it, eh? Well, Dr. X, we have ways . . .”

The man backed out of the doorway and disappeared.

“Max, shouldn’t we stop him?” 99 cried.

“Why? He’ll have to come back here eventually,” Max said. “He didn’t even take his toothbrush with him.”

“What shall we do now, Max?”

“Keep searching. Those invisible guinea pigs are here somewhere.”

“Rorff!” Fang barked, crawling out from under the bunk.

“Dust yourself off,” Max commanded.

“Max . . .” 99 said.

He turned to her. "Yes? What now?"

She pointed toward the doorway.

Max looked—and saw Dr. Zee (or Dr. X) and a steward standing in the opening.

"A-ha, went to get your confederate, eh?" Max said. "Well, it won't do you any good. You're still outnumbered. Three of us to two of you."

Fang ducked under the bunk again.

"All right, let's just say that it's even-Steven," Max said. "But that still gives us the edge. Because we're the Good Guys."

"Excuse me, sir," the steward said. "I'm not sure what this is all about, but Dr. Zee, here, wants to know—"

"Vot you doink in mine staderoom?" Dr. Zee said, breaking in.

"Max," 99 said, "do you know what *I* think?"

"Yes," Max replied, "and I'm beginning to think the same thing."

"That Dr. Zee is really Dr. Zee?"

"Yes, that just about sums it up." He addressed the steward. "Steward, there's been a slight mistake," he said. "You see, my friends and I were looking for the, uh, main ballroom—we heard the music and it set our toes to tapping—and, inadvertently, we wandered into Dr. Zee's stateroom." He turned back to 99. "See? A logical, wholly-believable explanation will do it every time."

"How do you explain the door?" the steward asked. "It looks like it's been blown right off the hinges."

"Rorff!" Fang barked from beneath the bunk.

"Yes, of course," Max smiled. "There's the explanation right there—we didn't have a key."

"Vot you doink in mine staderoom?" Dr. Zee asked again.

"Sorry—that's classified information," Max replied.

"I'll have to take you to the Captain," the steward said.

"Yes, I understand that—that's your duty," Max said. He gestured to 99. "Come along." Then he bent down and called to Fang. "You, tool"

The three stepped out into the corridor, joining the steward.

Max frowned at the door, which had been leaned against the wall. He turned back to Dr. Zee. "Sorry about that," he said.

"Vot you doink in mine staderoom?" Dr. Zee growled.

The steward led Max, 99 and Fang away.

As they moved along the corridor, Max fell in beside the steward.

"This is going to be a lot of fuss and bother for you," he said. He reached into a pocket and brought out a ten-dollar bill. "Couldn't we settle it among ourselves?"

"I couldn't accept a bribe, sir," the steward replied.

"A bribe? Bribe? Of course not. I had no intention of bribing you." He smiled slyly. "But, you could accept a little gift, couldn't you?"

"I don't think that would be improper," the steward said, smiling slyly in return.

"Good, good." Max pressed the ten-dollar bill into the steward's hand. "We'll call it a Christmas gift—and just say that Santa came a little early this year," he said.

"Thank you, sir," the steward said. He stopped at a door. "Right in here, sir."

"Where is this?" Max asked.

"The Captain's quarters, sir."

"Now, wait a minute—what about that bribe!"

The steward looked hurt. "But you said that was a gift, Santa."

Max glared at him. "All right, steward. But just don't be surprised next Christmas when you get lumps of coal in your stocking."

The steward opened the door and ushered the trio inside.

The Captain, a large, rotund man, was seated at his desk. He looked up as they entered. His face was pinched in an expression of indecision. "Tell me again, steward," he said, "which is left—port or starboard?"

"Port, sir."

"Thanks." He smiled at Max. "I can never get that straight," he said. "And it's important to know when you're in command of a ship. We have rules of the road, you know—just like on land. We have to keep to the starboard. Except, of course, when making a port turn." He got to his feet. "Now . . . what is it, steward?"

"I found these people—and this dog—looting another passenger's stateroom, sir."

"Oh . . . petty thieves, eh?" He nodded cordially. "Welcome aboard."

Max stared at him blankly. "Welcome aboard?"

The Captain spoke to the steward. "That will be all," he said. "I'll handle this."

The steward departed.

"Welcome aboard?" Max said again.

“Yes, of course,” the Captain replied.

“But the steward referred to us as looters. And you yourself called us petty thieves.”

The Captain shrugged. “Business is business. You paid your fare, didn’t you? As a matter of fact, most of our passengers are looters, petty thieves and card sharks. They’re on board to take advantage of the few passengers who *aren’t* in the trade—the rich tourists. But, if we depended on rich tourists, we’d go broke in a week. You looters, petty thieves and card sharks make up the bulk of our passenger list. We appreciate the patronage.”

“I see,” Max said dimly.

“However, there are limits to our appreciation,” the Captain went on. “If you get caught too often, I’m afraid I’ll have to get nasty about it. It’s bad for business.”

Max nodded. “Bad for business.”

“Yes. You see, if we catch too many looters, petty thieves and card sharks on board our reputation will suffer. Bad public relations. And that will chase away the rich tourists. And, if we don’t have a lot of rich tourists aboard, we’ll lose all the business we get from looters, petty thieves and card sharks. So . . . be careful. One hand washes the other, you know.”

“I’ll try to remember that,” Max said foggily. “Let’s see . . . wash my hands . . .”

“You may go now,” the Captain said. “But stay out of the way of that nosy steward. He’s the conscientious type—no feel for public relations at all. Keeps bringing looters, petty thieves and card sharks in here, expecting me to do something about it.”

“Yes, he isn’t very likeable,” Max agreed.

“Nobody likes him,” the Captain said. “Last Christmas, he got coal in his stocking.”

Max, 99 and Fang backed toward the door. “We’ll be careful,” Max promised.

“Oh . . . before you go,” the Captain said. “How does it go again? Starboard is left? Is that right?”

“Yes, that’s left—starboard is right,” Max replied.

“Thanks. I can never—”

Max closed the door.

“What now, Max?” 99 said.

“Back to looting—that is, searching—staterooms,” Max replied. “Who’s next on the list?”

“It’s getting a little late, Max. The staterooms will probably be occupied. I imagine the scientists are all in bed by now.”

“That’s a thought,” Max replied. “All right, we’ll knock off for the night, hit the sack ourselves, and get an early start in the morning. To paraphrase a wise old saying—it’s the early secret agent who catches the invisible guinea pig.”

They left the main deck and trudged wearily down the stairway toward C Deck. When they finally reached there, Max and Fang said good-night to 99, and she disappeared into her stateroom.

Max and Fang squeezed into their own room.

“Well, old buddy, who gets the top bunk and who gets the lower bunk?” Max said to Fang.

“Rorff”

“That sounds fair—we’ll flip for it.” He reached into a pocket and brought out a coin. “Call it, Fang.”

“Rorff!”

“Heads you win, tails I lose? Sorry, old buddy. You don’t expect me to fall for that old ruse, do you? I couldn’t possibly win that way. Now, which do you want—heads or tails?”

“Rorff!”

“Okay.”

Max tried to flip the coin. But there wasn’t space enough to maneuver. “Well, that’s out,” he said. “This stateroom isn’t even large enough to flip a coin in.”

“Rorff!”

Max brightened. “Yes, that’s a good way to settle the matter. Okay—first one into his jammies gets the bottom bunk. On your mark, get set—”

“Rorff!” Fang barked—from under the covers in the lower bunk.

“No fair” Max complained. “I hadn’t even got to ‘Go’ yet!”

“Rorff!”

Max sighed resignedly. “I guess you’re right. When you’re in a jammy race against an adversary whose overcoat serves as his business suit, bathing suit, tennis togs, tuxedo and jammies too—you can’t win!”

## 5.

EARLY THE next morning, Max, Fang and 99 met in the dining room for breakfast and to plan the day. After eating, Max and 99 had a second glass of milk, and Fang had a second bowl of coffee.

"That's quite unusual," the waiter said, placing the bowl of coffee in front of Fang.

"Yes, it is," Max admitted. "Normally, he drinks it out of a cup. But, today, I asked him to have it in a bowl—like any other dog. We're trying not to draw attention to ourselves."

"That'll do it," the waiter said. "Who would pay any attention to a dog having his morning coffee out of a bowl?"

"My thinking exactly," Max said.

The waiter departed.

Max turned to 99. "Now then," he began. "To take up where we left off—"

But he was interrupted by the appearance of the Tour Director, Herbert Wai, at the table. Wai peered interestedly at Fang. "That's fascinating," he said. "I don't believe I've ever seen a dog drinking coffee out of a bowl before."

"Rorff!" Fang barked.

"I don't think he really cares whether it's your first bowl or second bowl, Fang," Max said irritably.

"Does he do that often?" Wai asked.

"Well . . . no," Max said. "Usually, he drinks it out of a cup—like any other dog."

"I would think so," Wai said. Then he went ambling off, shaking his head in wonder, muttering, "Coffee in a bowl—most unusual."

"Max," 99 said, "are you sure we can cross that Mr. Wai off our list? There's something . . . well, very suspicious about him. Why did he stop at our table? I think he was trying to eavesdrop."

"Nonsense," Max said. "Wai doesn't fit the picture at all. Think about it a moment, 99. Who are we looking for? The diabolical Dr. X—right? Now, picture Dr. X in your mind. A beard—right? And a foreign accent—right? And a slinky sneaky manner—right?"

“Yes . . . I guess so, Max.”

“You *know* so. At least, that’s the way the diabolical Dr. X has always looked in every movie I’ve ever seen him in. Why, if he changed, no one would recognize him. And Dr. Xs are just like the rest of us—they need recognition.”

“You’re probably right, Max.”

“Of course I’m right. Now, let’s get back to business. As soon as Fang finishes his bowl of coffee, we’ll begin searching staterooms again.”

“Max, suppose we get caught—you know what the Captain said.”

“There is no chance whatever that we’ll get caught this time, 99,” Max said. “I did a little digging in that attache case before we came up to breakfast. And I found a disguise for us.” He rested his hand on a small package that he had placed on the table. “In here, 99, I have three white coats with the words Acme Air-Conditioning Repair stenciled on the backs. We will enter the staterooms posing as air conditioning repairmen—or, to be more exact, as an air conditioning repair man, and air conditioning repair girl, and an air conditioning repair dog.”

“But, Max,” 99 pointed out, “this ship isn’t air conditioned. The sea breezes keep it cool.”

“99, you underestimate Research and Development,” Max said. “Also in this package is a collapsible air-conditioner. And, not only that—it’s out-of-order!”

“You mean we provide our own malfunctioning air-conditioner?”

“Right. And, according to the instructions on the tag, it is absolutely impossible to get this machine to work. That means that we can take all the time we want to trying to repair it—it will *never* operate. Meanwhile, of course, we will be doing a little snooping.”

“I just hope it works, Max,” 99 said doubtfully.

“You mean you hope it *doesn’t* work,” Max corrected. “If it works, we’re sunk.”

“Rorff!”

“Fang is finished with his coffee,” Max said. “Let’s go.”

They left the dining room, then went out on deck and found a secluded corner. Max opened the package. It contained three white coats—one dog-sized—and a tiny tin box. After each had put on a coat, Max inspected the metal box.

“The tag said there was a button here to punch,” he muttered. “Let’s see . . . button, button, who’s got the—”

The tin box suddenly popped open, becoming an air-conditioner the size of a breadbox.

"There we are," Max said. "Now, where do we go from here?"

"Stateroom B-19," 99 replied. "Dr. Ignatz Popartsky."

They reached B Deck a few minutes later, and proceeded along the corridor until they reached B-19. Max rapped on the door.

"Who?" a voice called from inside.

"Air-conditioning repairman—also girl and dog," Max responded.

"Come."

Max opened the door. A large black-bearded man with a slinky, sneaky expression was seated at a desk. He was writing and did not look up.

"So far, so good," Max whispered to 99. "There's the beard. And with that slinky, sneaky expression, he's bound to have a slinky, sneaky manner. If he has a foreign accent, this may be it!"

Ignatz Popartsky raised his head—and beamed. "What's up, cats?" he said.

Max's face fell. "Wrong stateroom," he said. "We were looking for a foreign accent."

Popartsky's grin broadened. "Yeah, man, you got the wrong hidey-hole," he said. "The king's English is all the jazz you gonna heah 'round heah. Dig?"

"Dug," Max nodded, backing out. He closed the door. "Next?" he said to 99.

"That would be Dr. Halmar Halmar," she answered.

"99, you're repeating yourself."

"No, that's his name, Max. Dr. Halmar Halmar."

"His parents must have stuttered," Max said. "All right, let's go. Where is he?"

"Right down the corridor, Max. Stateroom B-31."

Max led the way. Reaching the door of Stateroom B-31, he knocked on it. A second later, the door opened. A large man with a close-cropped black beard stood in the opening.

"Vot is?" he asked.

"Ahhh, now we're getting somewhere," Max smiled. "Dr. Halmar Halmar?"

"Yes?"

“We’re here to repair your air-conditioner,” Max said. He turned his back to Dr. Halmar Halmar. “See? Right there across the shoulders of the coat—Acme Air-Conditioning Repair.”

Dr. Halmar Halmar looked puzzled. “I am having no air-conditioner,” he said.

“Of course not,” Max said, facing him again. “I have it right here. What good would it do you to have an air-conditioner that doesn’t work? Now, if you’ll just step back and let us in . . .”

Dr. Halmar Halmar, still puzzled, stepped back. Max, 99 and Fang trooped in.

Dr. Halmar Halmar stared at Fang. “Dot dog is air-conditioning repairman?”

Max chuckled. “That would be pretty silly, wouldn’t it?” he said. “Of course he’s not an air-conditioning repairman. He’s an air-conditioning repairdog.”

Dr. Halmar Halmar nodded dimly. “Oh.”

“Let’s see now, where would you like this installed?” Max said. “In . . . uh, one of your empty suitcases, perhaps?”

“Vot I vant vis air-conditioner in suitcase?”

Max’s eyes narrowed. “To keep your invisible guinea pigs cool, maybe?”

Dr. Halmar Halmar stared at Max for almost a full minute. Then he smiled feebly, said, “Haxcuse me,” and left the stateroom.

“99, this is it!” Max said exultantly. “Did you see what happened? One mention of invisible guinea pigs and he turned tail. It’s my guess that Dr. Halmar Halmar is, in fact, the diabolical Dr. X X.”

“But why did he leave, Max?”

“He probably thinks he can escape. I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s out there on deck right now trying to lower a lifeboat.”

“Shouldn’t we try to stop him?”

“First, the evidence,” Max said. “Let’s find that suitcase that contains the six invisible guinea pigs.” He put down the air-conditioner. “You try the closets, 99. I’ll look under the bunk.”

99 hurried to the closet.

Max kneeled and peered under the bunk. “Something under there,” he said, squinting. “I’ll just squeeze under and . . .”

A few moments later, 99 called, “Max . .

“Yes?” he answered from under the bunk.

“Max . . . you better come out.”

Max's head appeared. "What is it . . . ?"

At that moment, he saw Dr. Halmar Halmar and a steward in the doorway. It was the same steward that had caught them in Dr. Zee's stateroom.

Max glared at the steward. "I have a complaint," he said.

"Yes, sir?"

"Don't you people ever dust under any of your bunks?" Max complained., "There's a clod of dust under here that's big enough to pass for a suitcase."

"Vot you doink in mine staderoom?" Dr. Halmar Halmar said.

Max looked up at 99. "We can leave now," he said. "This is where we came in."

"If you don't mind, sir," the steward said, as Max crawled out from under the bunk, "I think an explanation is in order."

"And, you shall have it," Max replied. "You see, in addition to being ordinary passengers, we are also qualified air-conditioning repairmen—ah . . . man, girl and dog, actually. So, whenever we hear of an air-conditioner being on the blink, we lend a hand."

"There are no air-conditioners on board, sir."

Max pointed. "Then *what* is that?"

The steward bent down and peered at the air-conditioner. "I beg your pardon," he said.

"You accept our explanation, then?"

The steward frowned. "You say it's out-of-order?"

"I guarantee it," Max said.

The steward reached down and turned on the ON switch. A blast of cool air roared from the machine.

"Of course, that wasn't an *unconditional* guarantee," Max said. "Every once in a while this sort of thing happens—you get an air-conditioner that works. At the factory, we refer to this type as a 'lemon'."

"I think we'd better go see the Captain, sir," the steward said.

"I hardly think that will be necessary," Max said. "We've *seen* the Captain. And, when you've seen one Captain, you've seen them all."

"I'll have to insist," the steward said.

"In that case . . ."

The steward led the way, and Max, 99 and Fang followed.

"Vot you doink in mine staderoom?" Dr. Halmar Halmar called after them.

Max stopped. "Incidentally," he said, "how is it that your first name and your last name are the same?"

"Mine parents studded," Dr. Halmar Halmar replied. "But is even worse. Full name is Halmar J. Halmar."

"Oh? Really? What does the 'J.' stand for?"

"Halmar."

"I find that difficult to believe," Max said.

Dr. Halmar Halmar nodded sadly. "Is true. Middle name is spelled J-h-a-l-m-a-r. The 'J' is silent."

"*That* is believable," Max said, moving on.

When Max caught up with the others, 99 said, "Max, I'm worried. What do you think the Captain will do? He warned us not to get caught again."

"He may not recognize us," Max said. "We're wearing these white coats this time."

"I don't think we can depend on that, Max. Maybe we better tell him who we really are."

"99—we can't do that! Rule 301 says that a secret agent must never reveal his identity."

"Rorff!"

"It does *so* include dogs," Max snapped. "Remember, Fang, that you're a secret agent first and a dog second."

"But, Max," 99 said, "we could tell the Captain, couldn't we? He wouldn't tell."

"99, are you one-hundred per cent sure that the Captain is really the Captain? For all we know, he may be the diabolical Dr. X."

"Oh, Max! The Captain?"

"Remember, 99—he didn't know port from starboard. Does that sound like a ship's captain to you?"

"Well . . ."

"Of course, it isn't absolute proof that he isn't a captain," Max admitted. "Maybe he just wasn't listening when they took port and starboard in captain school. But . . . we can't take any chances. We have to continue to let him think that we're a trio of plain ordinary looters."

"All right, Max."

They reached the Captain's door. The steward knocked.

"Yes, yes, come in," a voice answered.

The steward opened the door and ushered Max, 99 and Fang inside,

“Looters again, sir,” he said.

The Captain, who was seated at his desk, glared at them. “Another bunch, eh?” he said.

“This is the same three, Captain,” the steward said.

“Oh. I didn’t recognize them in those white coats.” He got to his feet. “Steward, you may go.”

“Yes, sir.”

The steward departed.

The Captain smiled. “Hi, again,” he said “How’s business?”

“Captain, we can explain this,” Max said, “You see—”

“Just a minute,” the Captain broke in. I’m listening for the bells. My watch stopped.”

“The bells?” Max said.

“Yes. The ship’s bells. They ring the time.”

Max looked at his watch. “The time is exactly—”

“Don’t *tell* me! Don’t *tell* me!” the Captain said sharply. “I’m trying to learn how to tell time by bells!”

“Oh . . . sorry.”

A moment later, the bells rang. The Captain cocked his head, listening. When the bells stopped, he smiled again, pleased. “Exactly midnight,” he announced, setting his watch.

“Uh . . . Captain . . . it’s ten in the morning,” Max said.

“Oh, *darn!*”

“Well, you were close—only ten hours off,” Max said.

“Yes, I’m improving,” the Captain said drearily, sitting down again. “Yesterday, I was thirty-four hours off.”

“I don’t think that’s possible, Captain. There are only twenty-four hours in a day.”

“It wasn’t my fault,” the Captain explained. “They rang an extra bell.”

“Oh.”

The Captain scowled at them “So, you let that nosy steward catch you again, eh?”

“We’re sorry,” Max said. “We didn’t plan it that way.”

“That’s no excuse.”

“Well then, let’s say that we *did* plan it that way, and it worked out perfectly,” Max said.

“That’s better,” the Captain smiled. But then the frown reappeared.

“It doesn’t solve my problem, though,” he said. “I’m supposed to *do* something when looters are caught. And, for the life of me, I can’t remember what it is. Frankly, I wasn’t listening when we took what-to-do-with-looters in captain school.”

“I have a suggestion,” Max said. “Why don’t you put us on probation?”

“All *three* of you?” the Captain said. “Would all three of you *fit* on a mushroom?”

“No, no, Captain. Putting us on probation means releasing us and giving us a warning that if we ever get caught again you’ll send a wire to the captain school and ask them what it was you missed in the what-to-do-with-looters class.”

“I’ll do that,” the Captain decided. “Consider yourselves released.”

Max, 99 and Fang turned to go.

The Captain stared at the backs of their white coats. “My regards to the folks at Acme Air-Conditioning Repair,” he said.

When they reached the corridor again, 99 said, “Max, that was too close for comfort. We don’t dare get caught again. We’ll have to give up searching staterooms.”

“Nonsense,” Max said “Third time is a charm. And the next time will be the third time. It’s so safe, we could bungle it and still not get caught.”

“I hope you’re right, Max. I shudder to think what the Captain will do the next time we troop in there behind that steward.”

“That couldn’t possibly happen, 99. This time, we’re going to make sure that that steward is busy somewhere else. I made a note of his number—he’s Steward 76. I’m going to call the Chief Steward and have Steward 76 paged, and have him sent somewhere to stand by.”

“Max, that’s brilliant! And while he’s standing by, we can search staterooms. Where are you going to send him, Max?”

Well, let’s see? How about the indoor swimming pool? If we’re lucky, while he’s standing by, somebody will push him in.”

“That’s a great idea, Max.”

They went to the nearest lounge and Max picked up a phone and called the Chief Steward. A moment later, he hung up, then he and 99 and Fang listened expectantly. Not long after that a call came over the public address system: “Paging Steward 76—report to the indoor swimming pool and stand by.”

“That does it,” Max smiled. “Now, on with the search! What’s the next stateroom, 99?”

"It's here on A Deck, Max. Room 14."

It was a short walk to Stateroom 14. When they reached it, Max rapped on the door.

There was no response.

"Dr. X, apparently, is out," Max said. "Fine. That makes it clear sailing. Now, if the door will just—"

The knob turned and Max pushed the door gently open.

"Max, I guess third time is a charm," 99 said. "It's going so easily."

Max entered the stateroom and signalled 99 and Fang to follow. When they were inside, he closed the door.

"This time," he said, "I'll check the closet. 99, you check the dust."

"Yes, Max."

Max went to the closet and opened the door. "Three suitcases in here," he reported.

"Dust under here, Max," 99 replied, looking under the bunk.

Max lifted a suitcase. "No, this one is heavy—it must be full," he said. He lifted the second suitcase. "Nope—same here." Then the third suitcase. "No luck—this one is full, too."

"Max," 99 said, "are you sure that just because the guinea pigs are invisible they don't weigh anything?"

Max looked thoughtful. "Now that you mention it," he said, "I'm *not* sure. I've never weighed an invisible guinea pig."

"Maybe you better look inside the suitcases," 99 suggested.

"Right."

He opened the first suitcase. "99, would invisible guinea pigs be wearing argyle sox?" he asked.

"I doubt it, Max."

He closed the suitcase, then opened the next one.

"99 . . . how about a chartreuse tie that lights up in the dark and says 'Einstein Didn't Know the Half of It!'"

"Are there six, Max?"

"No, just one."

"Then it couldn't be the guinea pigs, Max."

Max closed the second suitcase, and opened up the third. He closed it again immediately.

"Rorff?"

"Never mind, Fang. Even a scientist—even *Dr. X*—is entitled to *some* privacy."

“Rorff!”

“I am *not* withholding evidence. There is nothing incriminating about a collection of Superman comic books!” He turned to 99. “Any luck?” he asked.

“None,” 99 reported, closing the last drawer of the chest. “Nothing in here but clothes. People clothes, not guinea pig clothes.”

Max stood in the center of the room pondering. “Obviously,” he said, “Dr. X removed the guinea pigs from the suitcase. But where did he hide them?”

“Rorff!”

“In a secret compartment? All right, I’ll go along with that. But where?”

“Rorff!”

Max smiled. “A secret compartment in the floor, eh? I’m afraid your imagination is running away with you, Fang. I’ve heard of secret compartments in the floor, yes. But in the deck? Hardly.”

“Rorff!”

“Where?”

“He said ‘under the rug,’ ” 99 translated.

“I know what he said,” Max replied. “I was expressing astonishment, not asking you what he said. I’m a little dumbfounded. Suggesting that there might be a secret compartment in the deck was fantastic enough, but adding to it by suggesting that—”

Fang had pulled back the rug, revealing a small door.

“Well . . . live and learn,” Max said. He kneeled down by the secret door. “Just large enough to get six invisible guinea pigs through,” he said. “99, I think this is it!”

“Open it, Max.”

“I can’t. It’s locked.”

“Rorff!”

“Good idea,” Max said. “It so happens that I do have another one of those door-opening gadgets that R and D sent along for experience-testing.”

“Max, that was an awfully strong explosive,” 99 said worriedly.

“But not *too* strong,” Max said, taking one of the coin-sized gadgets from his pocket. “R and D is very careful about things like that. Just enough T.N.T.—but never a pinch too much.”

He set the control to ON and dropped the gadget into the keyhole.

“Now then, I think we’d better step back a step, so we—”

A tremendous explosion rocked the stateroom. Smoke filled the air.

99 screamed. *"Max! We're falling!"*

"Yes, I think we blew the floor right out from under us," Max replied.

A moment later, there was a splash—as big as three splashes.

"Max!" 99 cried, gasping for air. "We're in the ocean!"

Max, bobbing on the surface, looked around. "No, 99," he replied, "we're not in the ocean."

At that moment, the face of Steward 76 appeared.

"Max! No!" 99 wept.

"Yes," Max said. "We're in the indoor swimming pool."

"It's directly below Stateroom 14 on A Deck," the steward explained. "Would you care to crawl out of the pool now? I think the Captain would like to see you."

The steward escorted Max, 99 and Fang—dripping wet—to the Captain's office.

"I fished them out of the pool, sir," he said.

"That's preposterous!" the Captain snorted. "What would they be doing in the pool in those white coats?"

"Would you believe that we were fixing the air-conditioning?" Max asked.

The Captain sighed, relieved. "I was afraid you wouldn't have a logical explanation," he said.

"They fell into the pool from Stateroom 14, Captain," the steward said. "They were looting it."

"And I say we were fixing the air-conditioning," Max insisted.

"That puts me in a bit of a spot," the Captain said. "Which one of you to believe?"

"I can settle that," Max said, turning his back to the Captain. "Read that! What does it say?"

The Captain squinted. "It says: 'Indian tent, totem pole, fat kangaroo, skinny—'"

"No, no, the lettering," Max interrupted.

"Max, that's what the lettering says," 99 explained. "It ran when it got wet in the pool. Now, Acme Air-Conditioning Repair looks like an Indian tent and a totem pole and a fat—"

"I know," the Captain broke in, "I'll believe you both. Max, because

I believe you, I'll let you go. And, because I also believe the steward, I'll tell you this: The next time you get caught, you go to the brig!"

"I'll accept that decision," Max said.

"So will I," the steward smiled. "With their luck, they'll be there before lunch."

"Yes," Max snapped, "and with *your* luck, you'll be the one who puts us there!"

"That's telling 'im, Max!" the Captain beamed.

## 6.

“HOW ARE we going to outwit that steward, Max?” 99 asked when they got outside the Captain’s office.

“Simple, 99. The old element of surprise.”

“But how exactly, Max?”

“Well, he expects us to begin searching staterooms again, doesn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“So, we’ll pull the old switcheroo. We’ll stop searching staterooms altogether.”

“Max, I don’t know how you do it! That steward will *never* figure that out!”

Max smiled modestly, “I’ve learned a few tricks in my life,” he admitted.

“There’s only one thing, Max,” 99 said. “If we stop searching staterooms, how will we ever find the six invisible guinea pigs?”

“That happens to be one of the tricks I haven’t learned,” Max replied.

“You mean, Max, we’re stymied?”

“I wouldn’t say that.”

“Then, we’re *not* stymied?”

“Oh, we’re stymied, all right. But that’s not the way I would have said it. I would have said that we’re stopped.”

“Oh, Max,” 99 fretted. “We just *can’t* be stopped. The whole civilized world is depending on us.”

Max suddenly brightened. “Wait a minute, 99! On second thought, we’re *not* stopped! We’re not even stymied! 99, we’ve been going about this all wrong. We’ve been fools!”

“Rorrrrrff!”

“All right, Fang, consider yourself included out. *I’ve* been a fool!”

“What did we do wrong, Max?” 99 asked.

“We’ve been searching staterooms for empty suitcases, that’s what we did wrong. Think about it a second, 99. Would a man as clever as

the diabolical Dr. X leave a suitcase full of invisible guinea pigs in his stateroom? No. Of course not! Think! What would he do with it?"

"Check it in the ship's safe?"

"No. Try again."

"Rorff!"

"No, Fang, he wouldn't paint it green and tell everybody it was a rubber plant."

"Mail it on ahead?" 99 guessed.

"99, Dr. X is clever, but he isn't that clever. One more try."

"Rorff!"

"That's ridiculous, Fang. In the first place, it wouldn't *fit* in the toe of his shoe. And in the second place— Well, yes, the second place makes sense enough. But the first place rules it out."

"I give up," 99 said.

"You still have one more guess, 99."

"No, Max, I give up. Tell me."

"Aw, come on, guess. Just once more."

"Rorff!"

Max groaned. "All right, Fang, you can have 99's third guess. What is it?"

"Rorff!"

"That's even more ridiculous than your rubber tree guess. Tell me, have you seen anybody walking about the deck with a suitcase with jingle bells on it and shouting 'Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas to All!'"

"Max, are you going to tell us, or aren't you!" 99 said.

"All right, here it is. My guess is that Dr. X is carrying that suitcase with him."

"You mean everywhere? Wherever he goes?"

"Everywhere!" Max said. "Consequently, all we have to do is find a man carrying a suitcase."

"Rorff!"

"I assure you, Fang, it won't be *that* easy. He will *not* be shouting 'Ho! Ho! Ho!'."

"Max, you know," 99 said thoughtfully, "I think you may be right. After all, those guinea pigs are worth a fortune. He *wouldn't* leave them in his stateroom."

"Rorff?"

"Simple," Max replied. "We'll just stroll around the deck, acting like

tourists, until we spot a man carrying a suitcase. That man will be the diabolical Dr. X. After all, why would anyone else be carrying a suitcase? Unless, of course, there are *two* men on board who are transporting invisible guinea pigs. But that's highly unlikely."

"Well, I guess we better start strolling," 99 said.

"Rorff!"

Max shook his head. "No, Fang, you will not be a bigger help sitting in a deck chair and waving to us each time we go by."

"Rorff!"

"I don't know, but we'll think of *some* way to keep count of our turns around the deck. Now, come on!"

They strolled off, leisurely.

"I'm glad you thought of this, Max," 99 said. "We might not have had a chance to see the ship if you hadn't."

"Keep your mind on your business, 99. Watch out for a man with a suitcase—and for *nothing* else!"

"Max, I think I ought to watch out for—"

"*Nothing else*, 99!"

"But, Max, I think—"

She was too late. Max lay sprawled on the deck. "Why didn't you warn me about that rope!" he glared. "I could have injured myself badly!"

"But, Max, you said—"

"Never mind what I said," he grumbled, getting up. "I'm revising that order. From now on, keep an eye out for a man with a suitcase, and for ropes. Check?"

"Check, Max."

They strolled on.

A little after midnight, the three, exhausted, dropped into deck chairs.

"Max," 99 sighed weakly, "I can't go another step."

"We have to keep going," Max breathed feebly.

"Rorff."

"Fang, that doesn't necessarily follow. The fact that you have four feet does not mean that you've walked twice as far as we have.

"Max, can't we suspend the operation until tomorrow?" 99 said. "Not only am I bushed, but there isn't anyone on deck to observe any more. They're all inside—gone to bed or they're at the dance in the ballroom."

“You’ve got a point there,” Max said. “In fact, if you weren’t so tired, I’d suggest that we go to the dance. How do we know that the diabolical Dr. X isn’t, say, a rumba enthusiast?”

99 jumped to her feet. “Max, I’m not a bit tired. Let’s go to the dance!”

“Well, much as I hate to, I think that’s—”

“Rorff!”

Max sat up. “Where, Fang?”

“Don’t listen to him, Max,” 99 said. “Let’s go to the dance.”

“But, 99, didn’t you hear what he said? He said he saw a shadowy figure slinking along the rail—*and*—carrying a suitcase!”

“I heard him, Max. You know what a wild imagination he’s got. Let’s go to the dance.”

“Sorry, 99—investigation before pleasure.”

“That’s what *I* say—let’s go to the dance.”

“Sh-sh-shhhhh!”

“All right, Max,” 99 said woefully.

Max peered into the dimness. “Yesssss . . . I think I do see a shadowy figure slinking along the rail—*and*—carrying a suitcase.”

“Male or female?” 99 whispered.

“I . . . can’t . . . quite . . . make out.”

“Max, it’s probably the Avon Lady.”

“No, there are no doorbells on board ship,” Max replied.

“Of course! Max, that’s why she’s slinking. Now, can we go to the dance?”

“Wait! 99, it’s a man!”

“Rorff!”

“There is no such thing as an Avon Gentleman, Fang.” He quietly got to his feet. “Follow me,” he whispered.

“Where are you going, Max?”

“I’m going to follow that man. I think, finally we’re on the trail of the diabolical Dr. X, 99.”

Max tiptoed toward the rail, with 99 and Fang following closely behind him. Then, together, they trailed the shadowy figure as it made its way stealthily along the deck.

“Subject proceeding South between deck chairs and lifeboats,” Max whispered. “Subject acting very suspicious.”

“What’s he doing, Max?”

“Subject glancing back, as if he thinks he’s being followed.”

“That is suspicious, Max.”

“Yes, it must be a result of his guilt. I’m sure he doesn’t *know* he’s being followed.”

“He couldn’t,” 99 agreed. “We’re too expert at it. The subject *never* knows.”

“Wait, 99—” Max said, halting. “Subject has stopped. Subject is bending down. Alert for a trick, 99.”

“Alerted, Max.”

There was a second of silence. Then Max said, “Scratch that trick, 99. Subject is tying his shoe,”

“Trick scratched, Max.”

Max moved on. “Subject proceeding again. Subject glancing back nervously. Hold it! Now, subject is running!”

“What’ll we do, Max!”

Max made a sound of annoyance. “I hate to run after him,” he said. “Subject is liable to get the idea that he was right when he got the idea that we were following him. And if subject knows that he’s being followed, it spoils the fun of it.”

“Still . . . if we don’t run after him, Max, he’ll get away.”

“Yes, there is *that* to consider.”

“Max, if we stand here debating, subject will get away altogether.”

“That’s a very valid point, too,” Max agreed.

“Rorff!”

Max looked back over his shoulder. “You’re right, Fang—here he comes from the other direction. Apparently he made a complete circle of the deck. All right, gang, let him pass, then we’ll pick up his trail again.”

The figure dashed past.

“Now!” Max shouted. And the trio took off in pursuit.

“Where is he now, Max?”

“Subject is scrambling into a lifeboat!”

“What’ll we do, Max?”

“We’ll scramble into the lifeboat behind his lifeboat, of course.”

They scrambled into the second lifeboat, then Max peaked out from under the cover. “Subject seems to be becalmed,” he reported. “Wait—subject is now peeking out from under the cover of his lifeboat. Subject’s eyes look terrified—as if subject has discovered that his

trackers are watching him from the lifeboat behind.”

“Do you think he’s on to us, Max?”

“I wouldn’t be a bit surprised.”

“Max . . . here’s an idea,” 99 said. “Since he knows we’re following him, it seems a little silly for us to stay in hiding. Why don’t we climb out and confront him—tell him we know he’s Dr. X and demand the formula and the suitcase?”

“And give up the chase, 99? Now? Now, when it’s just getting thrilling?”

“Max, hiding in a lifeboat isn’t really my idea of thrilling.”

Max sighed. “All right. Everybody out. Approach subject and confront him with accusation ”

The trio scrambled out of the lifeboat

“He ducked under the cover,” Max reported. He snickered. “I used to do that when I was a kid I thought if I covered my head, I couldn’t be seen,” Reaching the lifeboat, he got hold of the cover. “Well, it didn’t work for me,” he said, “and it won’t work for him.”

With a sudden movement, Max raised the lifeboat cover. “There you are!” he said triumphantly.

But subject was nowhere in sight.

Max frowned. “Now, how did he do that? It never worked for me.”

“Max!” 99 cried. “There he goes! Out the other end of the lifeboat!”

“Tally-ho!” Max shouted, giving chase.

Subject dashed through a doorway.

The trio dashed after him.

“Stop!” Max called. “Stop in the name of all that’s civilized and decent!”

Subject plunged through another doorway.

“That’s the way it is with evil-doers,” Max grumbled. “They’re not at all interested in all that’s civilized and decent!”

“Where is he now, Max?”

“Subject has just entered ballroom, 99.”

Max stopped—and 99 and Fang pulled up behind him.

“Subject is doing the watusi with . . . with . . . well, the fact is, subject is doing the watusi alone.”

“What now, Max?”

“This calls for a counter maneuver, 99. To be more specific, an old-fashioned waltz. You and I will waltz over to subject and interrogate

him on the dance floor.”

“All right, Max.”

Max took 99 in his arms and they began waltzing in the direction of subject.

A moment later, Max felt a nipping at his ankle. He looked down. “Yes, what is it, Fang?”

“Rorff!”

“No, you may *not* cut in!”

“Max,” 99 said, “subject is leaving us behind. He watusied right out the door.”

“Darn! And just when we were coming to the part where I whirl you around! Well . . . after him!”

The trio charged across the dance floor, then through the doorway.

“There subject goes!” Max pointed. “Down that dark corridor!”

They raced after subject.

“Can you see him, Max?”

“Yes, 99, he’s reached a dead end! He’s trapped!”

“Thank goodness. I’m winded.”

“Oops! Scratch that dead end, 99. He just ducked into a stateroom!”

“Dead end scratched, Max.”

They reached the end of the corridor. “In here,” Max said, indicating a stateroom door. “And, there’s no way out. This time, 99, we have him for sure!”

“Rorff!”

“No, Fang, I do not want to place any bets on it.”

Max slowly opened the stateroom door. He put his head in. Then he withdrew it, looking surprised.

“What is it, Max?”

“He’s in there,” Max replied.

“Yes . . . ?”

“He’s in there, sitting on the bed, waiting for us,” Max said, dazed.

“What else, Max?”

“That’s all. That’s it.”

“But you look so surprised.”

“99, as far as I can remember this has never happened before. Evil-doers always fight to the last. This evil-doer is giving up without a last-ditch struggle.” His eyes narrowed. “It must be a trick.”

“What can we do, Max?”

“Nothing, 99. The only choice we have is to walk into the trap. That’s the only way we’ll find out what it is.”

“Rorff!”

“No, Fang, going to our staterooms and getting a good night’s sleep will not make it go away.” He faced the doorway again. “All right—into the breach!”

Max pushed the door open.

Subject was still sitting on the bed, waiting. He was a round little man with a woebegone expression. His suitcase was resting on his lap.

“I surrender,” subject said. “You’ve got me. I give up.”

“A likely story,” Max sneered. “Go on—spring the trap and let’s get it over with.”

A tear rolled down subject’s cheek. “I never should have tried it,” he wept. “I was a fool. I should have known I couldn’t get away with it.”

“Watch out for those tears,” Max warned 99 and Fang. “They may be a nerve gas.”

Subject shoved the suitcase at Max. “Take it! I never want to see it again,” he sobbed.

Max jumped back. “Ah-ah—no you don’t! That’s an old one, my friend! Your suitcase is triggered to explode when opened—right?”

“It’s just a suitcase,” subject wept.

Max smiled slyly. “If that’s true—then *you* open it,” he said.

“I can’t bear to look inside it any more,” subject moaned.

“Ah-hah! Caught you! Since when is it unbearable to look at something that can’t be seen?”

Subject stopped weeping and peered at Max. “Pardon?”

“The jig is up, Dr. X,” Max said. “We know what’s in that suitcase.”

“Yes, I know you know. That’s why—” He looked closer at Max. “What did you call me?”

“A-ho—here comes the trick. I suppose you’re going to deny that you are the diabolical Dr. X.”

Subject nodded. “I’m Hemingway James,” he said. “I live at 707 Spruce Street in Boston and I’m a retired banker.”

The sly smile reappeared on Max’s lips. “I see . . . and you’re carrying those six invisible guinea pigs to Europe to stash them away in a Swiss bank—right?”

Subject stared vacantly at Max for a second. Then he leaned his head back and screamed. “Heeeeelp!”

Max whipped out his pistol. "None of that!"

"You're a nut!" Subject protested.

"Max . . . you know, maybe . . ." 99 began.

"99, don't be fooled," Max said. "I warned you that Dr. X was planning on pulling a trick."

"Rorff!"

"Right—that's the way to settle it," Max said. He turned back to subject. "Open that suitcase. If there's nothing in it, you're as good as convicted."

Subject suddenly hugged the suitcase to his chest. "I won't!"

"Now, we're getting somewhere," Max said smugly. "Give me that suitcase!"

"There's nothing in here but money!" subject protested.

"Money?"

"Yes. A million dollars. I stole it from the Boston Sheep Drivers and First National Bank."

Max peered at him dubiously. "*You* stole a million dollars from a bank?"

"Well, not alone," subject admitted. "I had a friend there."

"I'm sorry," Max said, "but I find that hard to believe."

"Would you believe a half-million dollars?"

"Not likely."

"A thousand dollars?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Twelve dollars and change?"

Max suddenly reached out and snatched the suitcase from subject. "Now, we'll get at the truth!" he gloated.

"Keep it right-side-up," subject warned. "The thousand-dollar bills are fragile."

Max placed the suitcase on the bed, then, dramatically, opened it. He turned slightly green.

99 peered over his shoulder. "Money!"

"A million dollars," Max sighed. He picked up a sheaf of thousand-dollar bills. "Here's a little sticker attached," he said. "It says: 'Stolen from the Boston Sheep Drivers and First National Bank'."

"That's cute," 99 giggled.

Max turned to subject. "I'm sorry," he said. "We thought you were someone else."

“A fine time to be sorry,” subject grumbled. “Chasing a man in and out of lifeboats, interrupting his watusi, chasing him down dark corridors, trapping him in his own stateroom. An honest man isn’t safe any more.”

“My apologies,” Max said.

“Treating a man like a common criminal!”

“Really, we’re very sorry.”

“I ought to report you to the Captain. And, I would, too—except that he’d probably ask a lot of questions about that stolen million dollars.”

“I don’t think so,” Max said. “The Captain has a big heart.”

“Still, it would be a lot of bother,” subject said. “I accept your apology.”

“Thank you, thank you.”

“That’s all right. Just get out of here now, will you? I want to count my money.”

“The bank’s money, you mean.”

“My money,” subject replied. “Finders keepers, losers weepers.”

Max, 99 and Fang backed toward the door. “My regards to your friend at the Boston Sheep Drivers and First National,” Max said.

“Thank you. And the same to Dr. X.”

Max closed the door. “Sweet guy,” he said.

“Maybe we should report him,” 99 mused.

“I think we’ve caused him enough trouble,” Max said. “Besides, if we did, he just might turn nasty and report us to the Captain. And you know what a kettle of fish that would be. The Captain warned us—next time, into the brig.”

They moved down the corridor. At a corner, Max nearly collided with a man carrying a suitcase.

“Sorry,” Max said.

“No, no—my fault.”

The man walked on.

“This ship is full of a bunch of sweet guys,” Max said.

“Max—that man—”

“Nice as could be,” Max said.

“But, Max—he was carrying a suitcase.”

Max stopped and looked after the man, who was ambling leisurely down the corridor.

“Yesss—he *is* carrying a suitcase. Do you suppose—”

“Stop him, Max!”

Max shook his head. “No, we almost got into trouble that way. This time, we’re going to use a little finesse.”

“Rorff!”

“No, it isn’t a mushroom. It means we’re going to play it cool. Instead of chasing that fellow all over the ship, we’re going to follow him, and, when the opportunity occurs, gain his confidence, then spring the trap.”

“Isn’t that dirty pool, Max?” 99 said.

“Not in the least,” Max replied. “When *they* do it, yes, it’s dirty pool. When *we* do it, it’s tactics.”

“Oh.”

“All right—after him,” Max said, leading the way. “But remember—cool!”

## 7.

THE TRIO followed the man with the suitcase along the corridor, then up a stairway, then along the deck. A moment later he entered the small lounge where after-midnight snacks were served.

Max, 99 and Fang tagged after him. When they entered the lounge they saw the man seating himself at a table. Like the man from Boston, he was small and round. He wore a jolly expression.

“What a disguise!” Max said, impressed. “You’d never know, would you, that, actually, that fellow is tall and thin and dark-complected and wears a beard.”

“He could have fooled me,” 99 admitted,

“We’ll sit at the counter,” Max said.

“Why don’t we sit at a near-by table?” 99 asked.

“It isn’t cool,” Max said.

They went to the counter and Max and 99 sat down on and Fang hopped up on a stool.

“What’ll it be?” the counterman asked.

“Nothing, thank you,” Max said. “We’re just tailing a suspect.”

The counterman nodded and went back to washing glasses.

“What’ll we do now, Max?” 99 asked.

“Observe,” Max replied. “Casually turn in that direction and—oops!”

Max found himself facing the little round man with the jolly expression.

“I think we’ve met before,” the man smiled. “In the corridor a moment ago, wasn’t it?”

Max played it cool. “That’s possible,” he said. “I don’t recall the incident, but you may be right.”

“I bumped into you,” the man said.

“It must have been someone else,” Max said.

“No, no, it was you.” He raised an arm. “Remember? I was carrying this suitcase.”

Max shrugged. “I’ll take your word for it,” he said. “But, frankly, I

still think it was someone else.”

“I was wondering . . .” the man said. “I was sitting over there at that table alone . . . would you care to join me?”

“Well . . . we don’t want to butt in,” Max said.

“I would consider it a favor.”

“We don’t usually sit with strangers,” Max said.

“Who’s a stranger? We met in the corridor a few minutes ago. Please—join me.”

“Well . . .”

“Oh, let’s, Max,” 99 said.

“Well, if Fang and 99 want to . . .”

“Rorff!”

“Maybe you didn’t say you wanted to—but you were thinking it. Cool can be overdone, Fang.”

“See?” the man beamed. “We’re friends! I know your names—Max, 99 and Fang. And, my name is Henry L. McHenry—call me Hank. So, who’s strangers?”

Max, 99 and Fang followed Hank to his table. When they were seated, Hank ordered snacks for all of them—cocoa and cookies for himself and Max and 99, and peanut butter on rye for Fang.

“I suppose you’re wondering why I carry this suitcase around with me wherever I go,” Hank said.

Max looked at him blankly. “What suitcase is that?”

Hank pointed to the suitcase, which he had placed on the floor next to his chair. “That suitcase.”

Oh, *that* suitcase. No, I can’t say that I noticed it,” Max said.

“It’s a nice color—green,” 99 offered.

“You ought to see it with jingle bells hanging on it,” Hank said.

“Rorff!”

“Eat your peanut butter and rye!” Max snapped.

“That suitcase—there’s a story connected with that,” Hank said. “It’s not just an ordinary suitcase. There’s something inside that would knock your eyes out. If you could see it.”

“This is *very* good cocoa,” Max said, sipping.

“Maybe you’d like to hear the story,” Hank suggested.

“About cocoa?” Max said. “No, I know the story about cocoa. The beans are picked when they’re very, very tender, then carried down the mountain on mule back, where a covey of Italian maidens are

waiting, barefoot, to stomp them into powder. The powder is then—”

“No, no, I mean the story of the suitcase,” Hank interrupted.

“I’ve probably heard that story, too,” Max said. “I hear a lot of stories.”

“But this is unique. A fantastic story.”

“Max, let’s listen,” 99 said. “It will kill some time, at least.”

Max sighed. “All right . . . tell away.”

“Well, it begins over twenty years ago,” Hank said, settling back. “I was a buck private in the army of occupation, stationed in Paris.”

“I think I’ve heard this story,” Max said.

Hank shook his head. “You couldn’t have. I’ve never told it before. But, somehow, I have confidence in you.” He settled back again. “It was a wonderful life for a buck private,” he said, smiling, remembering. “Paris was heaven. The people of Paris were destitute. They would do anything for a candy bar.”

“Sounds nice,” Max said.

“Delightful. War isn’t all fighting and killing, you know. It has its nice side, too—taking advantage of the destitute civilians.”

“Not everyone is sensitive enough to see that, though,” Max commented.

“But I was,” Hank went on. “I was young, I had feelings, I knew a good thing when I saw it. Well, to make a long story short, one day I met an old Parisian—a really desperate old man—who owned a Picasso. A painting, you know. A very valuable painting. This dirty old Parisian had once been a very rich and very honored man. But he had lost everything—except, of course, the Picasso—in the war. He was starving, his family was starving—oh, it was horrible.”

“You took pity on him,” Max said.

“Yes. I said to myself, ‘What does a man, a man who is starving, a man whose family is starving, what does a man like this need with a valuable Picasso?’ ”

“You were all heart in those days,” Max said.

“How true. There I was with a candy bar, and all this sad old man had was a valuable Picasso.”

“So you traded him on the spot.”

“Exactly. It was the least I could do. My candy bar for his Picasso.”

A tear escaped 99’s eye. “That’s sweet,” she murmured.

“Well, to make a long story short,” Hank went on, “when I returned to the States, I sold the Picasso for one-hundred thousand dollars.”

—”  
“That’s a very heartwarming story,” Max said. “Now, if you’ll excuse

“Oh, that’s only the beginning,” Hank said.

“What happened next?” 99 asked.

“Well, to make a long story short, I invested my one-hundred thousand dollars in hula-hoops. Do you remember hula-hoops? They were very big in those days. It was a big plastic hoop, and you got inside it—the hoop—then you twirled it around your waist. Great fun!”

“As I recall, the market for hula-hoops fizzled out all of a sudden, didn’t it?” Max said.

“Yes. I was stuck with a hundred-thousand dollars worth of hula-hoops—wholesale. But I wasn’t discouraged. I invented a new pastime. I called it Giant Ring Toss. I bought up a lot of old telephone poles—on credit—and, with each telephone pole, I sold a half-dozen hula-hoops. The idea of the game was to stand back and toss hula-hoops at the telephone pole. Great fun!”

“Sounds like a big seller,” Max said.

“Well, yes, to make a long story short, it was. I made a million dollars on it.”

“Good,” Max said. He started to rise. “But, it’s getting late, and—”

“Oh, there’s more to the story,” Hank said.

“Like what?” 99 asked.

“Well, to make a long story short,” Hank continued, as Max settled back in his seat, “I lost the million dollars.”

“Careless?” Max asked.

“You might say so. You see, I heard a rumor that hula-hoops were going to make a comeback. So, I chased around the country buying up all the Giant Ring Toss games I could find. For the hula-hoops, of course. I didn’t need the telephone poles.”

Max nodded, yawning.

“But, to make a long story short,” Hank said, “hula-hoops did not make a comeback. I’d spent a million dollars on hula-hoops, and it was all lost.”

“That’s the way the hoop twirls,” Max said.

“Which brings us up-to-date,” Hank said. “I’m broke. I spent my last cent for a ticket back to Paris.” He smiled. “But I’m not licked,” he said. He pointed to the suitcase. “My second fortune is right in there.”

Max perked up. “Actually, what you mean is, the means to acquire your second fortune is in there—right?”

“Right.” Hank beamed.

Max turned to 99. “Well, apparently our cool has paid off,” he said. “We have gained the diabolical Dr. X’s confidence and he has revealed himself to us.”

“It was a brilliant strategy, Max,” 99 gushed.

“Aren’t we still friends?” Hank said. “Somebody talk to *me*.”

“I’ll talk to you,” Max said. “Hand over that formula and those invisible guinea pigs.”

Hank looked at Fang. “What he say?”

“Rorff!”

Hank turned back to Max. “What he say?”

“He said ‘Rorff!’ Translated, that means that the jig is up. We know what you’re carrying in that suitcase. And we know how you intend to make your second fortune—by peddling those invisible guinea pigs to KAOS!” He pulled his gun and pointed it at Hank. “All right, open that suitcase!”

“You must be crazy!” Hank protested.

“Yes—crazy like a fox! Open that suitcase!”

Hank shrugged. He lifted the suitcase and put it on the table. Then, reluctantly, he opened it.

Max stared into the suitcase. “A candy bar?”

“Yes,” Hank said. “I have to start at the bottom again. I’m going back to get another Picasso.”

Max put his gun away. “Well, good-night,” he said, rising. “It was an interesting story.”

“I can also tell it with a French accent,” Hank said. “Would you like to hear it?”

“No, I think we’d better be toddling along. It’s getting late.”

99 and Fang also rose.

“Have some more cocoa and cookies, another peanut butter on rye,” Hank urged. “I’ll tell you about my childhood. I like to talk to you three—I have confidence in you.”

“Some other time,” Max said, backing away. “We have to turn in now. Busy day tomorrow.”

“I could talk to you while you sleep,” Hank said, getting up.

“Run for it!” Max yelled.

He and 99 and Fang dashed for the exit. They ran from the lounge, out onto the deck, then back inside, and down the stairway that led to C Deck. At Deck B-3 they paused.

"I think we've lost him," Max said, panting.

"I think we overdid it, gaining his confidence, Max," 99 said.

"Sometimes those things get out of control."

"Max, speaking of Control—shouldn't we check in with the Chief?"

"That's probably a good idea," Max said. He looked around. "There—there's a closet. We can duck in there."

They crowded into the closet and closed the door.

"Now, I'll remove my shoe," Max said, "and we'll—"

"What's the matter, Max?"

"It's too tight a fit in here. I can't reach my shoe."

"We'll wait, Max."

Max opened the closet door, stepped out, removed his shoe, then stepped back in and closed the door.

*Max:* Chief, this is Agent 86 calling. Are you there?

*Chief:* Wuzza-bubba whosiz?

*Max:* I think we have a bad connection, Chief. You're coming in fuzzy.

*Operator:* Don't knock the connections. It's him. He's half asleep. What do you expect at three o'clock in the morning?

*Max:* Sorry, Operator. I didn't mean to knock the connection.

*Operator:* Just watch it!

*Max:* Chief—are you awake now?

*Chief:* Max, you better have something important to report, calling me at this hour.

*Max:* I'm sorry, Chief. There's a time difference, you know. It's only two o'clock in the morning here.

*Chief:* Max, what is it!

*Max:* Just keeping you informed, Chief. After all, it was your idea. 'Keep me informed, Max.' That's what you said.

*Chief:* All right, Max. Inform me.

*Max:* Well, actually, Chief, we don't have a great deal to report. Although, we did run into a rather interesting character a few minutes ago. He's taking a candy bar to Paris to trade for a Picasso.

*Operator:* You woke him up at three o'clock in the morning to tell him *that*!

*Max:* Operator . . . do you mind?

*Operator:* You're keeping me awake, too, you know. Who do you think is handling this call? The Supervisor? Oh, no, not the Supervisor. You know what the Supervisor is doing right now? Sacked out in the ladies' lounge, that's where the Supervisor is right now.

*Chief:* Max, call me later, will you, please. There's too much interference on this line.

*Operator:* Just *how* do you mean that!

*Chief:* Max . . . please . . . call me back later.

*Max:* Right, Chief.

Max opened the closet door, stepped out, and hung up his shoe.

99 yawned. "Finally, we can get some sleep," she said.

"You go on ahead," Max said. "I'll see you in the morning."

"Aren't you coming, Max?"

"I can't. The Chief asked me to call him back."

"But I don't think he meant—"

"I'll wait about five minutes," Max said. "Then I'll give him another ring."

"But, Max—"

"I know, I know, it's an inconvenience to me," Max said. "But I can't let the Chief down. I promised I'd call him back. Good-night, 99."

"Good-night, Max."

"Good-night, Fang."

"Rorff!"

"Don't worry, if we get the same operator, I'll just hang up and call him back again in another five minutes."

## 8.

THE TRIO slept late the next morning. It was nearly noon when they arrived in the dining room for breakfast. When they were seated, the waiter handed out menus.

“What’s this?” Max said, frowning at the menu. “Roast beef? Roast turkey? Roast lamb? This isn’t the sort of thing a man likes for breakfast.”

“Sorry, sir. Breakfast is over. It’s time for lunch.”

Max sighed. “All right. I’ll have the roast turkey—but scrambled. And with sausage, buttered toast and coffee.”

“I’ll have two four-minute lambs,” 99 said. “And bacon, buttered toast and coffee.”

“Rorff!”

“There’s one at every meal,” Max said disgustedly. He spoke to the waiter. “Fang will settle for buttered toast and coffee,” he said. “But he wants them curried.”

“Yes, sir.”

The waiter departed.

“Well now,” Max said, “let’s see what’s on the professional menu. We still have a mission to complete. And, so far, the diabolical Dr. X has eluded our rapidly closing pincers.”

“Pardon, Max?”

“He’s outsmarted us.”

“Oh . . . yes. Max,” 99 said, “I think we ought to concentrate on those scientists again. After all, we know that Dr. X is among the group.”

“You’re probably right, 99,” Max said. He took a folded sheet of paper from his pocket and began unfolding it. “I have the scientists’ schedule here,” he said. “It was given to me along with my membership in the tour. Let’s see what the scientists will be doing today.” He scanned the sheet closely. “At nine this morning,” he said, “they met in the ship’s auditorium to hear a lecture on ‘Molecules and Atoms—Do They or Don’t They (And Why Only Their Scientist Knows).’ Too bad we missed that.”

“What are the scientists doing now, Max?”

“Let’s see . . . well, right now, they’re on a coffee break. Then at noon—” He glanced at his watch. “—exactly four minutes from now—they gather again in the auditorium for a lecture on ‘Space—The Way-Out Element’. That lecture is to be given by Dr. Maxwell Smart.” He folded the sheet of paper. “That lecture might prove interesting,” he said. “Personally, I don’t know the first thing about space. I forgot to read that book the Chief gave me.”

“Max!” 99 said, horrified. “That’s you!”

“*What* is me, 99?”

“That Dr. Maxwell Smart—the one who’s supposed to give the lecture on Space!”

Scowling, Max unfolded the sheet of paper again and looked at the schedule. “Yes,” he sighed, “that’s me, all right. I’d recognize that name anywhere.”

“Max, what are you going to do!”

“There’s only one thing to do, 99—give that lecture. If I don’t show up, the scientists may suspect that I’m not really a scientist. And, among those scientists who will suspect that I’m not really a scientist will be the diabolical Dr. X.”

“But, Max! You don’t know the first thing about Space. You said so yourself.”

“Don’t worry, 99. I’ll simply rely on Rule 17.”

“I don’t believe I remember that rule, Max.”

“Rule 17 reads: ‘Fake it!’ ”

At that moment, the waiter appeared with the food. “Roast turkey, scrambled; two four-minute lambs; and buttered toast and coffee curried,” he announced.

“Sorry, but we don’t have time to eat,” Max said, rising. “But I’m sure someone else will order the same thing—so the food won’t go to waste.” He motioned to 99 and Fang. “Let’s go—we’re due in the auditorium.”

They hurried from the dining room, raced down the deck, and darted into the auditorium just as the scientist who was conducting the meeting was opening the noon session.

“Gentlemen,” he said, addressing the large gathering of scientists, “I know this is a moment you have all waited for with growing anticipation. And so, without further delay, let us welcome our expert on Space, Dr. Maxwell Smart!”

A cheer went up. And Max, cool, calm and collected, took his place in front of the scientists.

“A funny thing happened to me on the way to the auditorium,” Max began.

There was genial laughter.

“I thought you would appreciate that,” Max smiled. “Now, for our subject for today—Space—The Way-Out Element.” He adjusted his tie. “As you gentlemen probably know, space is one of our most important elements. Without space, there would be nothing to put things in. Which, of course, would result in a great deal of overcrowding. Basically, I think, that explains what space is.

“The next question that comes to mind, of course, is ‘what are the various uses of space?’ And, the first thing we think of, naturally, is the use to which space is most commonly put. That is, to fill empty places—such as this auditorium—when all of the people have gone somewhere else.”

A half-dozen scientists rose and left.

“Which reminds me of a little poem that one of my fellow scientists once wrote on the subject of space,” Max went on. “As I remember it—and correct me if I’m wrong—it went: ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, great big space / There you are, all over the place. / Up above the world so high / And in between the apples and the crust in my apple pie.’ ”

A dozen-and-a-half scientists departed.

“But,” Max continued, “the thing about space that is probably of the most interest to us today is the fact that it is fire-proof—or, to be more truthful, fire-resistant. The records show that there was one instance in which space actually did catch on fire. But, just prior to that moment, it had fallen into a can of gasoline. So, that instance probably doesn’t count.”

Three dozen scientists made their way from the auditorium.

“In conclusion,” Max said, “I think it should be pointed out that there is always a danger in working with space. For instance, if you get too much of it into the laboratory, you will find that there is a great distance between you and your test tubes. All that running back and forth can be injurious to the health if you’re not used to it.”

Now, only one scientist was left.

“I think that just about covers all I know about space,” Max said. “Now . . . are there any questions?”

The one scientist raised his hand.

“I see a hand,” Max said. “Yes, sir?”

“Dr. Smart, I am Dr. Zee.”

“Yes, I thought I recognized you, Dr. Zee. We’ve met before, haven’t

we? In your stateroom, I believe.”

“Dot is right. Dr. Smart, I have a question.”

“Fire away, Doctor.”

“Dr. Smart, what is your opinion of the Van Allen Belt?”

“I think the buckle is coming loose,” Max replied. “If I’ve said it once, I’ve said it a thousand times—if Van Allen doesn’t get himself a pair of suspenders, he’s going to lose his pants.”

“I have another question, Doctor.”

“Yes, Doctor?”

“Do you believe there is life on Mars?”

“Well, I hope there is, Doctor. And, you know the old saying: Where there’s hope, there’s life.”

“One more question, Doctor.”

“Let’s rip, Doctor.”

“What you doink in my stateroom?”

“Sorry, Doctor. I refuse to answer that on the grounds that it could get me tossed into the brig.”

Dr. Zee bowed. “I thank you, Doctor.”

Max bowed in return. “Don’t mention it.”

Dr. Zee departed.

99 and Fang hurried to Max.

“You were marvelous, Max,” 99 said. “You were so far over those scientists’ heads, they slunk away in shame. How did you do it?”

“Rule 17,” Max smiled. “It never fails. I used it once when speaking on the subject of exotic mushrooms and cleared the hall in less than half the time it took me today.”

“The only one you didn’t fool, I think, was that Dr. Zee,” 99 said.

“Yes, and there’s a good reason for that, 99,” Max replied. “Unless I miss my guess, Dr. Zee is not really Dr. Zee.”

“You mean you think he’s—”

“Exactly. The diabolical Dr. X.”

“But, Max—we searched his stateroom. There was nothing to indicate that he was Dr. X.”

“Because we didn’t have the chance to search his stateroom thoroughly, 99. Remember? We were caught in the act.”

“I don’t know, Max. Why do you suspect Dr. Zee?”

“For the obvious reason that Dr. Zee suspects that I am not Dr. Smart.”

“You mean you suspect him because he suspects you?”

“Right. If he were really Dr. Zee, why would he suspect that I’m not really Dr. Smart? He’s suspicious, you see, because he suspects that he’s being sought.”

99 nodded. “I see, now. You’re suspicious of Dr. Zee because he’s suspicious of you, and he’s suspicious of you because you’re suspicious of him. That makes sense, Max. What do we do now?”

“Go back and have breakfast,” Max said.

“How will that help, Max?”

“It will fill the space in my tummy,” Max said. “And, it’s the only thing we *can* do right now. We can’t search Dr. Zee’s stateroom—because he’ll probably be in it.”

“When will we search his stateroom, Max?”

“Tonight. While Dr. Zee is at dinner, we’ll go over his stateroom with a fine-tooth comb.”

“All right, Max. But I still have my doubts about him being Dr. X.”

“I think someone is in for a big surprise,” Max smiled.

“Rorff!”

“Yes, yes, we’re going to breakfast,” Max said. “Come on.”

They left the auditorium, stepped out on deck, and headed for the dining room.

“I just hope that waiter hasn’t given away my scrambled turkey,” Max said.

That evening, at the dinner hour, Max, 99, and Fang entered the corridor that led to Dr. Zee’s stateroom.

“We’re taking an awful chance, Max,” 99 said. “You know what will happen if we get caught again.”

“There’s nothing to worry about,” Max replied. “I did a little scouting, and I’m happy to announce that that nosy steward is nowhere around.”

“I hope not, Max.”

“Ah . . . here’s the door. I’ll knock first—just to make sure Dr. Zee isn’t in there.”

Max knocked.

There was no response.

“All clear,” Max said.

“How do we get in this time, Max?” 99 said. “I don’t think it would

be wise to use that explosive again.”

“I brought along another little gadget provided by the boys in Research and Development,” Max said. “It’s a hinge-remover. I’ll simply use it to remove the hinges from the stateroom door.”

99 looked closely at the gadget. “What is it called, Max?”

“A screwdriver,” Max replied, setting to work.

Thirty minutes later, Max had the hinges off the door. Rising from his knees, he inspected the job he had done. “Perfect,” he said. “I think I can give R and D a passing mark on this screwdriver gadget. Now, then, let’s lift the door away from the opening. 99, you get hold of the knob. And I’ll get hold of these hinges. Then we’ll pull—out and away!”

“Max . . .”

“Yes, 99?”

“Max, when I took hold of the knob, it turned.”

“I don’t think that will give us any trouble, 99. The fact that the knob turned simply means that— Oh, yes, I see what you mean. The door has been unlocked all the time.” He shrugged. “Well, that doesn’t mean that the screwdriver isn’t a success. I still say, someday, somewhere, sometime, it will come in handy for something.”

Max opened the door and leaned it against the wall.

“Where shall we look, Max?” 99 said, entering the stateroom.

“Well, we can skip the closet this time. We did it the last time we were in here.” He looked around. “Those brief cases,” he said, pointing, “let’s go through them.”

“Rorff!”

“All right, Fang, you check under the bunk again. But don’t breathe too much of that dust.”

Max and 99 began opening and inspecting the contents of the several brief cases.

“Any invisible guinea pigs?” Max asked.

“Not yet.”

“Ah . . . 99 . . .” Max said, “are you sure you’d know an invisible guinea pig if you saw one?”

“I think so, Max. They look a little like big invisible rats, don’t they?”

“That’s right—just checking.”

“Max, there’s nothing here but papers,” 99 sighed. “Scientific papers. Papers, papers, papers.”

"I'm finding the same thing, 99 Papers, papers, papers."

"I don't even understand what they say,"

"Oh. well, that's simple enough. These are scientific papers on—"

"Max? What's the matter?"

"I think I know now why Dr. Zee was suspicious of me, 99."

"Why, Max?"

"Dr. Zee is a space scientist."

"Oh. Well, Max, you said someone was in for a surprise. I guess it's you."

"Surprised, yes," Max said grimly. "But not beaten. These papers on space science could be a ruse. They could be a red herring. Or, to put it more succinctly—a scarlet ruse."

"You mean you think Dr. Zee planted these papers here to lead us off the trail?"

"Exactly. He hoped that we would find these papers, think he was a space scientist, and chalk him off as a suspect."

"Then we better continue to search the room, right, Max?"

"Right, 99."

"There isn't anything else to search, Max."

"Then we'll start back at the beginning. We must have missed something. 99, check that closet again."

"Yes, Max," 99 said, going to the closet.

"And I'll look under the bed," Max said.

"Bunk, Max."

"No, I mean it—I'm really going to do it."

"All right, Max."

Max kneeled and peered under the bunk.

"Rorff!"

"What do you mean by that—'there's nobody here but us chickens!'"

"Rorff!"

"Oh, yes, I see what you mean. Covered with those dust puffs, you do look a little like a chicken."

"Max . . ." 99 called.

"Yes?"

"I think you're in for another surprise, Max."

Max got to his feet. He looked in 99's direction. She had opened the

closet door. And standing inside the closet was the nosy steward.

"That's exactly what I mean by 'dirty pool,' " Max said to 99.

"I knew you'd come back here sooner or later," the steward said, stepping from the closet. "A criminal always returns to the scene of the crime." He gestured toward the door. "The Captain is waiting."

Discouraged, Max and 99 marched out.

"You, too, chicken," the steward called.

Fang crawled out from under the bunk and fell into line.

The Captain sternly surveyed the culprits the steward had brought him. "Those two I believe," he said. "They look like looters. But what's that chicken doing with them?"

"One of the gang," the steward replied.

The Captain leaned forward, addressing Fang. "How did a nice chicken like you get mixed up with this bunch?" he said.

Fang shook himself. Dust puffs flew. "Rorff!" he barked.

"Well, you could have fooled me," the Captain muttered. He turned to Max. "You know what this means, of course. This is the third time you've been caught. Three strikes and you're in."

"Out," Max corrected.

"In," the Captain said. "In the brig. Take 'em away, steward."

"Captain, you're making a terrible mistake," Max protested. "I know, the evidence is against us, it looks like we're looters, all right. But that happens to be circumstantial evidence. Number one, if we're looters, what did we steal? Is anything missing?"

The Captain spoke to the steward. "Is anything missing?"

"No, sir."

"Another thing," Max said. "What proof do you have that we were even in that stateroom? We claim that we were nowhere in the vicinity."

"I was in my own stateroom," 99 said.

"And I was in the dining room having lunch," Max said.

"Rorff!"

"That, I won't believe," the Captain said. "Boston is thousands of miles from here."

"Let me put it this way," Max said. "Do you have a witness who can definitely place us in Dr. Zee's stateroom at the time of the alleged crime?"

"I was there, sir," the steward said. "I saw them."

"Your testimony is inadmissible," Max said.

"Why can't I accept his testimony?" the Captain asked, puzzled.

"Because, Your Honor, this man is a bribe-taker. I, personally, can testify that he accepted a bribe from me."

"Me, too," the Captain said. "It cost me ten bucks to get him to forget that I don't know port from starboard—or, vice versa, as the case may be." He addressed the steward. "Your testimony is inadmissible," he said.

"So, you see," Max crowed, "you have no evidence."

"I agree," the Captain said. He turned to the steward again. "Take 'em to the brig," he said.

"Yes, sir," the steward beamed.

"But, Your Honor!" Max objected. "I just proved to you that you have no evidence."

"Evidence-schmevidence," the Captain said. "Looting is bad for business." He waved a hand. "Lock 'em up!"

The steward turned the key in the lock, then hung the key on a hook—which was too far away from the cell to reach—then ambled off, whistling happily.

Max looked around at the cell. It was about the size of a closet. There was a cot—on which 99 and Fang were seated. He rattled the bars—and the bars rattled back.

"One thing about our predicament—it's going to make solving the case more of a challenge," Max said.

"Max, don't you think we ought to tell the Captain who we really are?"

"And break our word, 99? We promised when we took our oath never to reveal our true identities to anyone."

"Max, maybe, just this once, we could get permission from the Chief."

Max considered this for a moment, then said, "Well, we can try it." He sat down on the cot next to 99 and Fang and removed his shoe.

*Max:* Chief? Agent 86 calling. Are you there?

*Operator:* I'm sorry, sir. The line is busy.

*Max:* That's impossible, operator. This is a private line.

*Operator:* I don't make the rules, sir, I just follow them. And the rule is, I can't break in when the line is busy.

*Max:* Would it make any difference, operator, if I told you that the fate of the whole civilized world hangs in the balance?

*Operator:* There isn't any rule for that, sir. I'm sorry.

*Max:* Then let me put it to you as one human being to another. Would you, one human being, put me, another human being, through to the Chief, if I told you that unless you do the whole of civilization, as we know it, will be torn asunder?

*Operator:* I couldn't do that, sir.

*Max:* Operator, for the love of mankind, why not?

*Operator:* I'm not a human being, sir. I'm a recorded announcement.

*Max:* Oh . . . sorry about that.

Max slipped his shoe back onto his foot. "We'll have to try something else," he said. "The line is busy."

"I wish we had that attache case with us," 99 said. "Maybe R and D sent along something to cover this type of emergency."

"99—that's it!" Max cried.

99 looked him up and down. "You have the attache case? Where?"

"No, no, not the attache case. But I do have one of the gadgets." He held out a hand. "See this ring?"

"Very attractive," 99 said.

"That's what I thought—and why I put it on my finger. Little did I know that it would also prove practical. 99, this ring contains a nerve serum." He removed the ring and showed it to her. "See this little pin? When I shake hands with the bad guy, this pin will penetrate his flesh and inject the nerve serum into his blood stream—assuming, of course, that I'm lucky enough to hit a vein."

"Wonderful, Max! What does the serum do?"

"It puts the bad guy in a state of paralysis for a period of two hours. In other words, it knocks him stiff."

"How are you going to use it, Max?"

"I was afraid you'd ask that. Unfortunately, in order for this to work effectively, I have to have a bad guy to shake hands with. And, at the moment, there's a shortage of bad guys. I have only you and Fang."

"Maybe a bad guy will come along, Max."

"No, the only human we'll see while we're in here is the waiter who will bring us our food. And it's very unlikely that the waiter will be a

bad guy. Unpleasant, perhaps. But not a genuine, bona fide bad guy.”

“Max . . . couldn’t we fudge a little?”

“You mean pretend that the waiter is a genuine bad guy?”

“Why not, Max? How do we know—maybe, deep down, he really *will* be a bad guy.”

“We’ll fudge,” Max agreed. “When our waiter arrives with our food, I’ll get him to shake hands with me and inject the serum into his blood stream—assuming, of course, that I’m lucky enough to hit a vein. Then, 99, you and I and Fang will sneak out and do a little investigating.” He brightened. “In fact, we can sneak out between all of our meals.”

“We might get caught, Max.”

“So what? Who would object to a little between meal sneak?”

## 9.

THE WAITER arrived on schedule at dinner time. He was carrying a tray of food.

"We're certainly glad to see you," Max said. "We're starving." He put his ring hand through the bars. "Welcome."

"Glad to be of service, sir," the waiter replied, ignoring the hand.

"Not yet, Max!" 99 whispered. "Wait 'till he opens the door."

"Oh . . . yes."

The waiter put the tray down, then got the key from the hook.

"You look to me like a man with large veins," Max said. "Am I right?"

"No, sir," the waiter said, unlocking the cell door. "I come from a family of small-veined people. It's our pride—our dainty veins."

"Imagine that!" Max said. "I come from a dainty-veined family myself." He extended his hand again. "Nice to meet you."

But at that moment the waiter turned away to retrieve the tray.

"Keep trying, Max," 99 whispered.

The waiter opened the door and entered the cell. He put the tray down on the cot. "I'll come back for it in about an hour," he said.

"And we'll be happy to welcome you," Max said heartily. "Welcome you with a merry ho-ho and a joyous handshake." Once more he extended the hand.

The waiter smiled. "Sorry, sir. Ship's personnel aren't allowed to indulge in physical contact with passengers."

Max kept the hand extended. "It'll be our little secret," he said.

"I would know, sir. I couldn't sleep at night with a thing like that on my conscience."

"We wouldn't have to call it a handshake," Max suggested. "We could say that you were admiring my dainty veins. What could be more natural—one dainty-veined man admiring the dainty veins of another dainty-veined man."

The waiter shook his head. "It would be cribbing, sir."

"Suppose, waiter, my dainty-veined hand had a ten-dollar bill in it? Would *that* be cribbing?"

“No, sir,” the waiter smiled, “that would be dandy.”

Max got a ten-dollar bill from his pocket, folded it, and placed it in his hand. “Now, then, waiter . . .” He said, extending a hand.

The waiter took the hand, warmly, and he and Max shook hands. When Max withdrew his hand, the ten-dollar bill was gone.

“How are you feeling, waiter?” Max said. “A little woozy?”

“No, sir. Just fine. And much richer.”

“Max . . .” 99 said.

“Yes?”

99 whispered to him. “You shook hands with your right hand, Max.”

“Of course. I’m right-handed.”

“But the ring is on your left hand, Max.”

Max faced back to the waiter. “There’s been a slight miscalculation,” he said. “Let’s try that handshake again.”

The waiter shook his head. “I couldn’t, sir. I’m already in too deep. Psychologically, I’m already scarred for life—probably.”

“You won’t shake hands with me, is that right?”

“Yes, sir.”

“All right then, I won’t shake hands with you.”

“Fine, sir.”

“That’s an agreement—right?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Fine—let’s shake on it.”

“Yes, sir.”

They shook hands again. This time, Max used his left hand. And the instant their hands gripped, the waiter dropped like a stone.

“Ha! Dainty veins, eh!” Max sneered. “He had a vein big enough to drive a truck through.”

“We’d better hurry, Max,” 99 said. “He’ll only be out for a couple hours.”

“Just a minute, 99. We can’t go out on deck like this. That steward would spot us in a second. We’ll have to disguise ourselves.”

“How, Max?”

“Well, I’ll trade clothes with this waiter. And you . . . hmmm, that does present a problem.”

“Rorff!”

"The perfect solution!" Max exclaimed.

99 stared at Fang. "I didn't know his sheepdog coat could be taken off," she said.

"A little gimmick worked up by R and D," Max said. "He's fitted out with a zipper. Come here, boy."

Fang trotted over to Max. Quickly, Max zipped him out of his sheepdog coat.

99 stared, stunned. "He looks like—"

"Right—like a Mexican Hairless," Max said. "That is *his* disguise."

"Rorff!"

"I know you're chilly, Fang. But bare up. Remember, it's for the good of mankind."

"Rorff!"

"In this case," Max said, "mankind includes dog-kind, too."

"But, Max, that still leaves me—I'm not disguised," 99 said.

"No sooner said than done."

Max picked up Fang's sheepdog coat and tossed it casually about 99's shoulders. "There you are—you're a wealthy eccentric."

"Wealthy, Max?"

"You're wearing a fur."

"Eccentric, Max?"

"Have you ever seen a conformist with a sheepdog around his shoulders?"

99 nodded. "You're right—as usual—Max."

"Now then, if you two will step outside," Max said. "I'll change clothes with this waiter. And then we'll be off."

99 and Fang slipped out of the cell, and waited for Max in the corridor. A few minutes later, he appeared, looking exactly like a ship's waiter.

"Rorff!"

"Take your own soup back to the kitchen," Max snapped.

"Now, Max?" 99 said.

"Now," Max said. He led the way along the corridor, then up the stairs to the deck. "Ah . . . fresh air," he breathed as they emerged.

"You—waiter!" a voice barked.

Max turned—and found himself facing a steward.

"What are you doing out here?" the steward said. "Get back to the dining room where you belong. Dinner is being served."

"I just stepped out for a breath of fresh air," Max said. "The odor of that food in the dining room was making me a little ill."

"It makes us all a little sick," the steward said. "But duty is duty. Back to the dining room."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll go along with you, just to make sure you get there," the steward said.

"That won't be necessary, sir. I know the way."

"That's why I'm going with you," the steward said. He looked about sheepishly. "You see," he said, lowering his voice, "I'm lost. But if I can just make it back to the dining room, I'll be all right. I know my way from there."

"Yes, sir," Max sighed. "Follow me."

Max and the steward walked off down the deck.

"Fang, what'll we do?" 99 wailed.

"Rorff!"

"Yes, I suppose we might as well," 99 agreed. "That way, we'll be near Max. And, we can have dinner, too."

99 and Fang hurried off toward the dining room.

As Max entered the dining room a different voice called to him. Turning toward it, he found himself being addressed by a sportily-dressed man at a table. Across from the man was a woman, presumably his wife.

"Waiter," the man said, "we ordered our chicken livers and fried rice an hour ago. It isn't here yet. Where is it?"

"That's a special order," Max replied. "It takes time, you know, to prepare a delicacy like chicken livers and fried rice. First, of course, before you can fry the rice, you have to catch it. Ever tried chasing down a rice? On a ship? And, even after you catch it, there's the chicken liver to contend with. A chicken doesn't give up its liver willingly. You have to fight it for it."

"Then we'll change our order," the man said. "Just bring us a couple hamburgers and chocolate malts."

"With or without?" Max asked.

"With or without what?"

"That's waiter talk," Max explained. "It means do you want your hamburger with or without meat. And your malt—with or without malt."

“With.”

“Roger,” Max replied. He winked. “More waiter talk,” he explained.

Max moved on, crossing the dining room, then entered the kitchen through the swinging doors. The cooks were at the stoves, and other waiters were bustling about, picking up orders.

“Two longhorns under the covers! Two moo-moos, dark brown!” Max called out.

A cook raised his eyes from his work and stared at him. “What?”

“That’s waiter talk,” Max explained. “It means two hamburgers and two malts.”

“Why didn’t you say so?” the cook grumbled. He set about preparing the order.

Max, meanwhile, began looking for a rear exit through which to escape.

“You!” the cook called. “Go get me another order! You think two longhorns under the covers and two moo-moos, dark brown will keep me busy all night?”

“Yes, sir,” Max said grudgingly. “More orders—coming up.”

Max left the kitchen and returned to the dining room. He stopped at the nearest table. “What’ll it be, folks?” he said.

“Max—it’s us,” the girl at the table said.

He stared at her. “99!”

“Rorff!”

“I don’t *have* to guess who you are,” Max said testily.

“And this,” 99 said, indicating the man at the table, “is Herbert Wai—pronounced ‘Y’. You remember Mr. Wai, don’t you, Max? He’s the tour director, escorting the scientists on the tour of European laboratories. Mr. Wai joined us at our table.”

“All the other tables were taken,” Wai explained.

“Well, in that case, I guess I’ll have to sit here, too,” Max said, pulling out a chair.

“Are you, uh, doing double duty?” Wai asked, as Max sat down. “That is, dining and waiting on tables, too?”

Max nodded. “It’s the only way you can get any service in here,” he said. He took out his order book. “As I said before, ‘What’ll it be, folks?’ ”

“I’ll have the Special,” Wai said.

“Me, too, Max,” 99 said.

“Rorff!”

"That makes it unanimous," Max said. "I'll have the Special, too." He wrote up the order, tore the page from the book, and handed it to Wai. "Just take this to the kitchen and hand it to a cook," he said. "He'll put the order on a tray. Just bring the tray back here."

"Why me?" Wai said puzzledly, accepting the order.

"There's a waiter shortage," Max explained. "We all have to pitch in and do our part."

"Oh . . . well, in that case . . ."

Wai got up and headed for the kitchen.

"A little trick," Max explained to 99 and Fang. "I had to get him out of the way so we could talk privately."

"I understand, Max," 99 said. "What is it you have to say?"

"I want you to stall your dinner," Max said. "Do anything you can to keep from finishing. Because as soon as I get off duty here as a waiter I want to continue the search for the diabolical Dr. X. And I want you and Fang to be close at hand. I don't want to have to go looking for you."

"We'll be right here, Max."

Max felt a finger tapping him on the shoulder. "Yes?" he said, turning and looking up. The man whose order he had taken earlier was standing by his chair.

"Where are my two hamburgers and two malts?" the man asked crossly.

Max turned away and looked at the table. "They're certainly not here," he said. "Try the kitchen."

"Oh . . . all right."

The man moved on.

"There's one in every dining room," Max muttered.

At that moment, Herbert Wai reappeared. He was carrying a tray. "All out of the Special," he said. "But I did manage to get us some longhorns under cover and some moo-moos, dark brown."

"What's that?" 99 asked.

"Actually, it's the same as the Special," Wai replied. "Except without malt."

He put the food on the table, then sat down. "The cook was asking about you," he said to Max. "He has some orders he wants you to deliver, I believe."

"First things first," Max said. "I haven't eaten yet."

Wai turned to 99. "You're not eating," he said curiously.

"I'm waiting for my moo-moo to cool," she smiled.

"And your longhorn under cover?"

"I'm waiting for it to cool, too."

"Fact is," Wai said, "it's stone cold as it is. The order had been sitting around out there in the kitchen for hours, waiting for a waiter to deliver it."

"Then she's waiting for it to warm up," Max said.

"Her moo-moo?"

"You noticed, of course, that she's a rich eccentric," Max said. "That's one of her eccentricities—she likes hot malteds."

Wai stared baffledly for a moment—at Max, then at 99, then at Fang. Then he shrugged and began to eat.

The man whose order Max had taken earlier reappeared. He picked up the tray that Herbert Wai had put aside. Then, on it, he put Max's hamburger and malt and Fang's hamburger and malt. Then, without a word, he marched off, headed for his own table.

Max glared at him as he moved away. "Yep," he said disgustedly, "there's one in every dining room—a sorehead."

"Sorry about that," Wai said sympathetically. "May I get you another order?"

Max shook his head. "No, thank you," he replied. "That hamburger was stone cold, anyway."

Wai touched his napkin to his lips. "Too bad," he said. "It *was* tasty."

"Oh, finished?" Max said.

"Yes. And I think I'd better be toddling on."

"Just a moment—I'll give you your check," Max said. He picked up the order. "Let's see, that's four longhorns under cover and four moo-moos, dark brown . . ."

"Scratch the dark brown," Wai said. "Remember—no malt."

"Oh, yes. Four moo-moos plain. That comes to exactly four dollars and some change, give or take a nickel or two." He handed the check to Wai. "If you'll just sign this . . ."

Wai accepted the check and the pencil and signed it. Then, rising, he smiled and said, "It's been delightful."

"Well, it would have been if the kitchen hadn't run out of dark brown," Max said.

Wai bowed. "Ta-ta."

"Ta-ta to you, too-too," Max said.

Wai smiled once more, then departed.

“Isn’t he charming, Max,” 99 said. “A real gentleman.”

“Yes, my kind of folks,” Max said. He frowned. “Let’s see . . . what was his name again?” He picked up the check to look at the signature. “Oh, yes . . . X.”

“No, Max—Wai.”

“No, 99—X.”

“Wai.”

“X.”

“Rorff!”

“No, Fang, Zee was the fellow with the beard.”

“Max,” 99 said, “his name is Wai—pronounced ‘Y’ ”

“Then why did he sign this check with an X?” Max suddenly straightened, stunned. “99! That charming gentleman we’ve been dining with! That is the diabolical Dr. X!”

“Max, if couldn’t be. No beard. No foreign accent.”

“I told you before, 99, he shaved off his beard to disguise himself. And, as for a foreign accent, what do you think that ‘ta-ta’ was?”

“Max—I think you’re right!”

“The diabolical Dr. X! Right in our clutches! And we let him get away!”

“Max—let’s go after him.”

Max looked at his watch. He sighed. “I can’t, 99. I’m still on duty for another half-hour.”

“Rorff!”

“Fang, you’re right,” Max decided. “The fate of the whole civilized world is more important than waiting on tables.” He jumped up. “Let’s go!”

Max, 99 and Fang rushed out on deck—then stopped.

“Oh, Max,” 99 moaned, “we don’t know which way he went.”

“Fang,” Max said, “this is your big chance. Let’s see what that nose can do!”

“Rorff!”

“He has the scent!” Max cried gleefully.

Fang went bounding down the deck, then abruptly skidded to a halt.

“That door!” Max exclaimed as he and 99 hurried up behind Fang. “He’s sniffing that door! X must have gone in there!”

“Careful, Max,” 99 said. “He may be dangerous.”

“They’re all dangerous until they meet Max Smart!” Max said. “Then, suddenly, they’re nothing but a shuddering bowlful of jello!” He put a hand on the door knob and pulled out his pistol. “Ready?”

“Ready, Max.”

“Rorff!”

“Then . . . this is it!”

Max yanked open the door—and stared into the ship’s kitchen.

A cook’s head appeared. “Yeah?”

“Ah . . . we were looking for a bowlful of jello,” Max said.

“All out,” the cook replied. “That and dark brown for the chocolate malts.” He slammed the door.

Max turned to Fang. “My congratulations to your nose,” he said sarcastically. “That was the prettiest case of kitchen-finding I ever saw.”

“Rorff!”

“That’s no excuse,” Max snapped. “That guy took my longhorn under cover and moo-moo, too-too. But you don’t see me sniffing around kitchen doors when the fate of the whole civilized world hangs in the balance, do you?”

“Rorff!”

“Your apology is accepted. Although, little good it does. Now, we’ve lost the diabolical Dr. X.”

“We’ll find him again, Max,” 99 said. “He’s somewhere on the ship.”

“Yes, 99, but we’ll be spending most of our time in the brig. Have you forgotten that?”

“I did—for a second—Max.”

“Well,” Max sighed, “all we can do now is just amble around, hoping we come across him by accident. Let’s go.”

They started out.

But they had gone only a few steps when 99 suddenly stopped, put a hand on Max’s arm and said, “Look!”

Max looked. “You’re right, 99—it’s him!”

Herbert Wai was walking toward them along the deck. He was carrying a small brown paper bag.

“Quick! Back into the shadows!” Max said.

The three withdrew into the shadow of a lifeboat.

“Why are we hiding, Max?” 99 whispered.

"That brown bag," Max said. "He may have a weapon in there."

"But, Max, why don't you just step out and confront him and turn him into a quivering bowlful of jello?"

"Equipped with a weapon, a bowlful of jello can turn nasty," Max replied. "I prefer to play it Smart."

Herbert Wai passed by, then entered the ship's kitchen.

"Why did he go in there, Max?" 99 asked.

Max smiled. "Suddenly, 99, it's all clear to me. The answer to your question is obvious."

"Then why, Max?"

"Think, 99. What do we have? We have the diabolical Dr. X. We have six invisible guinea pigs. And we have a brown paper bag. What does that add up to?"

"Eight."

"Eight, 99?"

"Dr. X is one. And guinea pigs is six. And paper bag is one. One and six and one is eight."

"Correct. And that's exactly where Dr. X is—right behind the eight ball. You see—"

"Max! There he is!"

The kitchen door had opened, and Herbert Wai had emerged. He strolled up the deck, away from where Max, 99 and Fang were hiding.

"You'll notice," Max said smugly, "that now the brown paper bag is no longer empty."

"Was it empty before, Max?"

"It had to be. Because now it's filled. All right—after him. But quietly and slowly. Don't let him see us."

At a safe distance, the trio followed Herbert Wai along the deck, then up a stairway, then down a corridor. Finally, he entered a small lounge and went to a row of lockers.

The trio halted, watching from outside the lounge.

"What is he doing, Max?"

"He's opening a locker."

"What now, Max?"

"He's emptying the contents of the brown paper bag into the locker."

"He must be putting whatever it is in there for safekeeping," 99 guessed.

"On the contrary, 99. He fully expects that what he's putting in there will be gone, and very soon."

"I don't understand, Max."

"Simple, 99. That is food he's putting into the locker. Food for—"

"Six invisible guinea pigs!" 99 exclaimed.

"Exactly!"

"What's he doing now, Max?"

"He's closing the locker. Now, he's locking the locker. And now he's —"

"What, Max? What is he doing?"

"He's blowing air into the brown paper bag," Max reported.

"He's what?"

"And now," Max said, "he's going to pop it."

There was a loud pop.

99 giggled. "That's silly, Max."

"I don't see anything silly about it," Max said. "I like to pop brown paper bags, too."

"What now, Max?"

"He's walking over to that refuse container. Now, he's disposing of the brown paper bag."

"We can get it as soon as he leaves," 99 said.

"What for? It's no good to us. It's already been popped."

"For evidence, I mean, Max."

"Oh . . . yes . . . that . . ."

"What now, Max?"

"He's still trying to get the brown paper bag into the refuse container. It's full. Oh-oh—now he's throwing the brown paper bag on the deck. That's an evildoer for you every time. A bunch of Jitterbugs. Wait a minute—there he goes. He's leaving the lounge."

"Do we follow him, Max?"

"Not quite yet," Max said, stepping into the lounge. "First, we have to get a look inside that locker. I am one-thousand per cent certain that we'll find six invisible guinea pigs in there—but—"

"But what, Max?"

"But I'm not entirely sure," Max said. "And, it might be a little embarrassing if we charged Dr. X with keeping invisible guinea pigs in that locker, and, upon opening it, found nothing but a pair of old tennis shoes."

99 nodded. "It would be hard to explain. So, what do we do, Max? Open the locker?"

"Right on the button, 99."

"How, Max?"

Max turned to Fang. "Fang, run down to our stateroom, open the attache case, and bring me the gadget that looks like a ballpoint pen."

"Rorff!"

"No, there is not time to stop for a sandwich on the way."

Fang bounded off.

"That dog thinks of nothing but his stomach," Max complained.

"Max," 99 said, "you didn't answer my question. How?"

"Simple, 99. We'll rent the locker right next to the locker that contains the invisible guinea pigs. Then, using an acetylene torch, we'll burn a hole between our locker and the pigs' locker."

"You mean the pen is—"

"Right—an acetylene torch."

"That's *marvelous*, Max!"

"Except when your signing checks," Max said. "Then, it has its drawbacks."

A few minutes later, Fang reappeared. He was carrying a ballpoint pen in his teeth.

"We're on the threshold of success, 99," Max said, taking the pen from Fang. He reached into his pocket, got out a quarter, and dropped it into the slot in the locker door that released the lock. The door swung open.

Max squeezed his head and shoulders and one arm into the locker.

"Stand back," he said, "this torch may create a lot of heat."

"We're back, Max."

For a moment, nothing happened. Then Max was heard grumbling.

"How are you doing, Max?"

"Wonderful. This pen writes beautifully. I just drew a gorgeous circle on the metal partition." He backed out of the locker. "All right, Fang," he said disgustedly. "You can take this pen back and bring me the torch!"

"Rorff!"

"I think you can manage it—if you just keep in mind what you're looking for," Max replied. "It says 'torch' on it."

Once more, Fang bounded off.

## 10.

MINUTES LATER, Fang returned. This time, he had the torch. Again, Max wiggled as much of himself as possible into the locker. Then, a soft blue flame appeared inside the locker.

“Max . . . are you all right?” 99 asked worriedly.

“Never been better,” Max replied. “It’s quite cozy in here.”

A few minutes later, Max withdrew. “Done and done,” he announced happily.

“Max, your eyebrows are singed.”

“A small price to pay for entrance into that next locker,” Max said.

“Did you cut the hole, Max?”

“A perfect round circle.”

“Could you see into the next locker, Max?”

“Very clearly.”

“Max . . . what did you see?”

“Absolutely nothing,” Max replied. “Proof positive, I believe, that we’re on the right track.”

“What now, Max?”

Max put the torch into the breast pocket of his jacket. “Now,” he said, “I will reach through that hole and squeeze. And if we hear a squeal we will know that we have found six invisible guinea pigs.”

“Be careful, Max.”

“*Caveat emptor*, 99.”

“What does that mean?”

“That’s Latin, 99. It means, ‘Let the guinea pigs beware, I can take care of myself.’ ”

Carefully, Max reached into the locker, then, cautiously, he reached through the hole in the partition.

“Yiiiiiiiiiii!”

Max yanked his hand out.

“Was that a squeal, Max?” 99 said excitedly.

“No, 99—that was a shriek of pain,” Max said. “One of the little beggars bit me!”

“Wonderful, Max!”

“Yes, I suppose it is—depending, of course, on how you mean that.”

“I mean that’s all the evidence we need. Now we know that Wai is X.”

“99, couldn’t you put that another way?”

“All right. It means that Herbert Wai is really the diabolical Dr. X.”

“That’s better. The other way, it was a bit too much for even me to believe.” He closed the locker door, removed the key, and put it in his pocket. “Now,” he said, “we’ll confront the diabolical Dr. X with our knowledge of his true identity, and—”

“And what, Max?”

“—and see how the ball bounces,” Max replied. “Frankly, I’m not sure what we’ll do. Legally, Dr. X has every right to sell his formula to the highest bidder—even if that bidder is KAOS. We’ll just have to play it by ear.”

“You’ll think of something, Max,” 99 said. “I know you will.”

“I’m sure I will,” Max said. “The question is—will it work?” He shrugged. “Well, nothing ventured, nothing gained. Let’s go.”

Max led the way, and 99 and Fang followed close behind. They left the lounge, hurried down a stairway, and emerged on deck. Max increased the pace, and 99 and Fang trotted to keep up. A moment later, they entered the ballroom, and edged their way across the dance floor, dodging in and out between the couples. When they reached the other side of the ballroom, they stepped out on deck again. Once more, Max increased the pace. 99 and Fang ran to stay near him. They climbed a stairway, then entered a corridor. At the end of the corridor, they came upon another stairway, and headed downward.

“Are we getting close, Max?” 99 panted.

“I haven’t the faintest idea, 99,” Max replied. “Don’t you remember? We don’t know where Wai’s stateroom is.”

“Max . . . then . . . why are we running?”

“We haven’t got all night, 99. We have to find Wai—or X, as the case may be—get that formula from him, and get back to our cell before that waiter comes to.”

“Max . . . wouldn’t it be easier . . . if we found out where Wai’s stateroom is?”

Max halted. “Sorry,” he said. “Sometimes I get carried away.”

“Max, as the tour director, he wouldn’t be on the passenger list, but there must be a staff list,” 99 said. “If we could get hold of it, we could find out which stateroom Wai is occupying.”

“Wait a minute, 99—I have an idea. There must be a staff list. If we could just get hold of it, we could find out which stateroom Dr. X is occupying.”

“Max . . . that’s what I just said.”

“No, you said ‘Wai’. I said ‘Dr. X’. There’s a difference, 99.”

“Rorff!”

“It’s a subtle difference. I wouldn’t expect you to be able to see it. But,” he said graciously, “I won’t argue the point. We’ll just say that we both got the same idea at the same time.”

“All right, Max, I’ll accept that,” 99 said. “Now, what shall we do about it?”

“We’ll get the staff list,” Max replied. “Let’s see, who would have a copy of it? The Captain, I suppose. Yes—that’s what we’ll do. We’ll go to the Captain’s cabin, and Fang will go in and ask him for a copy of the staff list.”

“Won’t he think that’s a little odd, Max?”

“Of course not. He won’t recognize Fang. He’ll remember him as a sheepdog. And Fang is now a Mexican Hairless.”

“Then it may work,” 99 agreed.

“It’s a cinch—the flawless plan,” Max said. “Let’s go.”

They turned around and walked back up the stairway, then entered the corridor and hurried toward the end. But, when they were halfway along the way, a party of ship’s officers suddenly appeared at the end of the corridor.

“There they are—Stop!” the leader shouted.

“Max! They mean us!” 99 cried.

“Yes—look! That waiter we left in our cell! He’s with them!”

“They know we escaped!” 99 said.

“About face! Run for it!” Max shouted.

The three whipped around and raced back along the corridor.

Behind them, the posse took up pursuit.

“Stop! Halt!”

Max, Fang and 99 reached the end of the corridor, turned, and plunged down the stairway.

99 looked back. “Max! They’re gaining!”

“Faster!” Max urged.

“Max, we’re right behind you. Hurry!”

“I’m going as fast as I can. You try leading an escape sometime with

a telephone in your shoe!”

“Sorry, Max. I know you’re doing your best.”

The trio, Max still in the lead, raced out onto the deck.

“This way!” Max cried, charging forward.

Behind them, the posse appeared on deck.

“Stop! Halt!”

“I wish they’d find something different to shout,” Max complained.  
“Stop! Halt! Always the same old thing!”

From behind came the cry, “De-accelerate!”

“Thanks!” Max called back.

“Max—there’s the ballroom!” 99 said. “Maybe we could hide in there.”

“Quick! There’s the ballroom!” Max said. “We’ll try to lose ourselves among the dancers!”

They plunged into the ballroom.

“Grab a partner!” Max commanded.

99 threw herself into the arms of a middle-aged man who, alone, was shaking and shivering from head to toe, wholly absorbed in his own personal version of the watusi.

“Go away!” he grumbled. “I’m dancing!”

“I’m your partner,” 99 said.

“What do I want with a partner—I’m dancing!”

99 joined him, nevertheless, a few feet away.

Meanwhile, Max glided into a waltz with the nearest available soloist. “Haven’t we met before?” he said, peering closely at his partner.

“Rorff!”

“Fang! I didn’t recognize you on your hind legs!”

“Rorff!”

“Sorry about that,” Max said, looking down. “Which toe was it?”

At that moment, the posse charged into the ballroom. It stopped, and the officers began inspecting the dancers, looking for Max, 99 and Fang.

“Cheek-to-cheek, Fang,” Max ordered. “That way, we’ll hide our faces.”

“Rorff!”

“My excuse is that I haven’t had a chance to shave. What’s *your* excuse?”

“Max!” 99 whispered, watusi-ing up. “They’re coming this way!”

“Drat! I was sure we’d blend in with the other dancers.”

“They’re closing-in, Max!”

“All right—we’ll show them a fancy step I learned from Rex Astaire.”

“Fred Astaire, Max.”

“Rex Astaire. He won the hundred-yard-dash at Muskogee, Oklahoma, High School in 1932.”

“What’s the step, Max?”

“About face! Run for it!”

Max, 99 and Fang took off across the dance floor.

“Halt! Stop!”

“Back in the old rut again,” Max complained.

They dashed from the ballroom, emerged on deck, and raced away. A few seconds later, they made a left turn, entered a stairway, and plunged downward.

“Where to, Max?”

“Down. It’s easier than up.”

Down, down, down, they fled. Past B Deck and all its sub-decks. Past C Deck and all its sub-decks. And still, down, down, down.

“Max—I hear a ringing!”

“My shoe!” Max replied. “It’s the Chief calling!”

“Hadn’t you better answer it, Max?”

“Yes—it might be important.”

Hopping down the steps on one foot, Max removed his shoe.

*Max:* Agent 86, here. Could you make it short, Chief?

*Chief:* Max? Is that you, Max? We must have a bad connection. You sound very strange—and far away.

*Max:* Strange how, Chief?

*Chief:* As if you were hopping down a flight of stairs.

*Max:* Actually, Chief, that isn’t so strange. I am hopping.

*Chief:* Shopping for what, Max? And why are you shopping? You’re supposed to be on a case.

*Max:* Not shopping, hopping, Chief. You see, a bunch of bad guys are chasing us. Well not bad guys, really. Actually, they’re just a little confused. You see, they think we’re the bad guys. Anyway, they’re

chasing us down a flight of stairs. And, in the meantime, we got a call from you.

*Chief:* Max, this connection is terrible. What did you say? You took a fall on who?

*Max:* No, Chief—call from you. My shoe rang.

*Chief:* What orangutang? Stop monkeying around, Max.

*Max:* No, no, Chief. Shoe. Shoe. Shoe.

*Chief:* Max, what are you doing on a train? You're supposed to be on a ship.

*Max:* Chief, I believe there's a simple explanation for this. What I feared would happen, has happened. The further out in the ocean we get, the weaker my signal becomes. Do you understand?

*Chief:* That part is clear, Max. What puzzles me is how you got to Hindustan in the first place. And, now that you're there, why you're wasting your time buying lotion.

*Max:* I don't think it came in quite as clear as it could have, Chief. Let me try again, (he shouts) *We're too far away!*

*Chief:* Fire away at who, Max? Are you in trouble?

*Max:* Yes! We're being chased! And I'm hopping down the steps on one shoe!

*Chief:* A pair of whose?

*Max:* Shoe! Shoe, shoe, shoe, shoe, shoe!

*Chief:* Is that the same train, Max?

*Max:* Chief, this is getting us nowhere. I'll call you back later.

*Chief:* Max, this is getting us nowhere. Why don't you call me back later?

*Max:* I will, Chief.

*Chief:* It's been a thrill for me, too, Max. So long.

"Max! They're gaining!" 99 cried, looking back and seeing the posse closing in.

"Just let me . . . get my shoe . . . back on," Max said. "Ah . . . there now! All right—full speed ahead!"

Max, 99 and Fang plunged on at full speed for another three steps—then came to a dead end at the bottom of the stairs.

"What now, Max?"

"That way!" Max said, pointing down a short corridor. "Through that door!"

“Max, that says ‘Engine Room.’ ”

“99, this is no time to be squeamish. If it’s good enough for the Injuns, it’s good enough for us. Come on!”

They raced down the corridor, then into the Engine Room. Max closed the door behind them.

“Look, Max—engines!” 99 exclaimed.

“I’m not greatly surprised,” Max replied, surveying the huge machines. “Somehow, more or less, a fella sort of expects to find engines in an engine room.”

“Max—that man!”

“Oh, yes—the fellow at that control panel. That must be the Chief Engineer.”

“All is lost, Max!”

“No, he looks like a friendly Injun to me. Let’s find out.”

They approached the man at the control panel. “How!” Max said, raising a hand.

The man glanced back over his shoulder. “Very simple,” he said. “You just punch a button and it operates itself.”

“You Chief?” Max asked.

“Ugh.”

“Me friendly paleface,” Max said. “Gotum heap big trouble. Being chased by bad guy palefaces. Chased for many moons. Upstairs, downstairs, all around the reservation. You hide-um. Me be heap grateful.”

“Paleface brother soundum like some kindum nut,” the man replied.

“Be thatum as it may, Chief,” Max said, “the problemum still remains. Needum place to hide.”

“Costum plenty wampum,” the man said.

“How muchum?”

The man eyed the ballpoint pen in Max’s breast pocket. “Me hide-um paleface brother—including paleface sister and paleface pooch—and paleface brother slip me magic stick that write-um under Father of Waters.”

“It’s a deal-um,” Max said, handing over the ballpoint pen. “Just one thing—I wouldn’t write any *big* checks with that pen. It has a tendency to heat up.”

“Are you kidding? You think me ignorant savage? Chief know acetylene torch when he see-um one.”

“Where do we hide?” Max asked.

“Getum behind big machine,” the man said. “When bad guy palefaces come in, me say, ‘No spikka da Angleesh.’ ”

Max, 99 and Fang darted behind the largest of the big machines. A moment later, they heard the posse shouting ‘Halt! Stop!’ as the officers entered the engine room.

“Hey, you seen two culprits and a dog?” they heard a voice ask.

“No spikka da Angleesh,” the Chief replied.

“There is no truer friend-um than the noble savage,” Max whispered to 99.

“They must be in here,” the leader of the posse said. “This is the only place they could have gone.”

“No spikka da you-know-what,” the Chief insisted.

“True to the very end,” Max whispered.

“If you’re hiding them, you can kiss your job goodbye,” the leader of the posse said.

“Me? Hide-um? Me be crazy to hide-um one paleface brother, one paleface sister and one paleface pooch over there behind big machine.”

“I think that was the very end,” Max said.

“What now, Max?” 99 whispered.

“Rorff!”

“Right! About face! Run for it!”

Max, 99 and Fang leaped up from behind the machine, plunged through the surprised posse, and charged out the door. They raced down the short corridor, then headed pell-mell up the stairs.

Behind them, they heard, “Halt! Stop!”

“They’re playing our song,” Max commented.

Several minutes later, the trio emerged on deck. The cries of ‘Halt!’ and ‘Stop!’ were right behind them.

They ducked through a doorway, entering a long corridor.

“Max! Look! Ahead! Another dead-end!” 99 cried.

“We have only one choice, 99. They must never take us alive!”

“You mean?”

“Yes.”

“No, Max—I’m too young to die!”

“Die? Who said anything about dying?”

“You said they must never take us alive.”

“Yes. But what I meant was, we’ll have to duck into one of these

staterooms.”

“Oh.” She looked down the long corridor of doors. “Which one, Max?”

“A vacant one.”

“But, Max, how do you know which one is vacant?”

“I have a little system for determining that, 99. It goes: Eeny, meeny, miney, Moe—”

Using the system, Max picked a stateroom. He grasped the door knob and slowly turned it. “It’s open!” he crowed. “The system never fails!”

Max, 99 and Fang hurried into the stateroom, then Max quickly closed the door. Pressing against it, they listened. They heard the sounds of the posse. There were shouts and calls and much shuffling up and down the corridor. Then the sounds disappeared.

“Safe!” Max breathed. “Saved by a vacant stateroom.”

“Not entirely vacant,” a voice behind them said. “As a matter of fact, it’s rather crowded right now.”

Startled, they turned—and found themselves faces to face with Herbert Wai.

## 11.

“Dr. X, I presume,” Max said.

“Sorry . . . you must have the wrong stateroom,” Wai replied. “I’m Wai—pronounced ‘Y.’ ”

Max’s eyes narrowed. “I’m afraid your little game is up, Doctor,” he said. “You made one fatal mistake.”

Wai looked at him perplexedly. “Oh? What was that?”

“You—” Max frowned. He turned to 99. “What was that fatal mistake he made? It’s slipped my mind.”

“The check, Max.”

“Oh . . . yes.” He faced back to Wai. “As you will undoubtedly recall, less than a half-hour ago, you were sitting in the dining room with us having dinner. When—”

“I don’t recall that,” Wai said. “As far as I know, I’ve never seen any of you before in my whole life.”

Max scowled. “Don’t remember, eh? Well, let me see if I can refresh your memory. I was the rather handsome gentleman sitting at your left. My associate here, 99, was at your right. And this Mexican Hairless was under the table.”

“I’m sure I would remember that—if it ever happened,” Wai said. “No, I believe you have the wrong man.”

Max turned to 99 again. “Do *you* remember it, 99?”

“Very clearly, Max.”

“Fang?” Max asked.

“Rorff!”

“Yes, that’s right, you wouldn’t have been able to see his face, would you? Not from under the table. Well, how about his shoes? Do you remember his shoes?”

“Rorff!”

Max addressed Wai again. “Would you lift your trousers just a bit?” he said. “Fang would like to get a look at your sox.”

Wai complied.

“Rorff!”

"There, that settles it!" Max said. "Fang never forgets a sock."

Wai sighed. "Well, for the sake of argument, I suppose we can say you're right," he said. "Actually, I may have been there. I have a very poor memory. There are those who say I'm a bit absent-minded. Though, off hand, I can't recall who they are."

Max, somewhat confused, put a hand to his forehead. "Can anybody recall what I was saying when I got sidetracked?" he asked.

"The check, Max," 99 said.

"Yes . . . the check. That check, when you signed it, X, was your fatal mistake."

"Sorry about that," Wai said. "Forget to add in the tip again, did I? It happens all the time." He reached into his pocket. "Let me make it up to you."

"It's a lit-tle bit too late for that," Max said.

"Well then, next time. I'll see that you get a double tip next time."

"There won't be a next time," Max said. "As I said before, your little game is up. When you signed that check, you signed it with an 'X'."

"Oh, drat!" Wai said. "Did I do that again!"

"A-ha! You admit, then, that you are the diabolical Dr. X!"

"I admit to the Dr. X," Dr. X replied. "But 'diabolical'—I think that's putting it on a bit thick. Fact is, I'm just a simple, harmless scientist. And, you can't even *prove* that."

"Oh, can't we? What about those six guinea pigs, Doctor?"

"Six guinea pigs?"

"Six guinea pigs in a public locker."

"Public locker?"

"Six guinea pigs in a public locker in the small lounge on A Deck."

"Oh . . . *those* guinea pigs." He looked at Max warily. "Did you *see* them?"

"Of course not."

Dr. X sighed defeatedly. "Well then, I guess there's no point in denying it. All right, I admit it. I *am* the diabolical Dr. X. And I do have six invisible guinea pigs stashed in a public locker in the small lounge on A Deck. But—the question is—what do you intend to do about it?"

"That's not very kind of you," Max said, hurt. "I was doing rather well until you brought up that question."

"It wouldn't do you any good at all to snitch on me," Dr. X pointed out. "Who would believe you?"

“You forget, Doctor—I know where the evidence is stashed.”

“Six invisible guinea pigs? Who would take your word for that? The Captain?”

“Doctor, I’m going to be big about this,” Max said. “I’m willing to make a deal.”

“Not interested,” Dr. X said.

“Then let me appeal to your better nature, Doctor. You know, inside every bad guy there is a good guy trying to get out. Open your heart, Doctor, and let that good guy free.”

“Nonsense. KAOS will pay me a fortune for my serum.”

“Money, Doctor, cannot buy a good name.”

“Nonsense again. Money can buy a lot of good names—General Motors stock, Ford Thunderbird, a Tiffany diamond, Wrigley’s spearmint, Nabisco shredded wheat . . . oodles of good names.”

“Yes, Doctor, but how will you feel when you’re driving your Ford Thunderbird, clipping coupons from your General Motors stock, admiring your Tiffany diamond, chewing your Wrigley’s spearmint, and pouring cream on your Nabisco shredded wheat, and you hear someone in the crowd say, ‘There goes the diabolical Dr. X—rich in material goods, but poor in spirit’?”

“I’ll feel fine,” Dr. X replied. “I’ll buy the fellow and have him shot.”

“Doctor, I’m beginning to suspect that you do not have a little good guy inside you who is trying to get out.”

“That’s quite observant of you, Max.”

“Then there is nothing I can say that will make you consider the deal I have to offer?”

“I’m not in the least interested.”

Max pulled his pistol. “Then does *this* interest you?” he said.

Dr. X studied the little round hole in the end of the barrel for a second, then replied, “*That* interests me.”

“I knew if I kept trying I’d find your weak spot,” Max said. “Now then, here is my deal. You will turn over the formula for the invisibility serum to me. And, I, in turn—”

“I’m afraid that’s impossible,” Dr. X said.

Max raised the pistol. “Still impossible?”

“Yes, unfortunately. The formula no longer exists.”

“I find that hard to believe, Doctor. Didn’t you write it down?”

“Yes. But I wrote it down on the back of a grocery list. And then—well, I’ve already explained how absent-minded I am. I saw that old

grocery list lying around, and I tore it up.”

“But can’t you remember the formula?”

“I can’t even remember not to sign my own name.”

Max nodded. “I believe you.”

“Then, Max, our mission is accomplished!” 99 said. “If there’s no written formula, and if Dr. X can’t remember it, then he has nothing to sell to KAOS!”

“I don’t think it’s quite that simple, 99,” Max replied. “Dr. X isn’t sailing to Europe just for the fun of getting there.”

“No, getting there is only half the fun,” Dr. X admitted.

“And the other half is the money,” Max said. “Dr. X still has something to sell. Am I right, Doctor?”

“All I’ll give you is my name, rank and serial number,” Dr. X replied gruffly.

Max raised the pistol again.

“My name, rank and serial number and anything else you want to know,” Dr. X said.

“All right, Doctor—besides those six invisible guinea pigs, what else are you taking to KAOS?”

Dr. X went to the chest, opened a drawer, and took out a hypodermic. “This,” he said.

“That hypodermic needle?”

“It isn’t just any old hypodermic needle,” Dr. X replied. “It contains a dosage of my invisibility serum.”

“I see,” Max said. “It’s all becoming quite clear, Doctor. Your intention is to deliver that serum to the KAOS laboratory. There, the KAOS scientists will break the serum down into its component parts. And, with that information, they will be able to reconstruct the formula.”

“You guessed it,” Dr. X smiled.

“But, as I said twice before, your little game is up, Doctor. That serum will never reach the KAOS labs. I intend to destroy it.”

“Stand back!” Dr. X warned.

“I haven’t moved,” Max said.

“But you were thinking about it!” Dr. X charged. “And, if you take one step in this direction, I will inject myself with the serum and become instantly invisible!”

Max smiled. “I don’t think you’ll do that, Doctor.”

“Cross my heart!” Dr. X warned.

“No, I repeat, I don’t think you’ll do that. You see—absent-mindedly, I suppose—you forgot to fill the hypodermic with serum. It’s empty.”

“I did *not* forget!” Dr. X said peevishly. “I specifically remember doing it. Right after breakfast. I got up about seven. Then I showered and dressed. Then I went down to the dining room and had the Morning Special. I sat with one of the other scientists—a Dr. Zee. He had a very interesting story to tell. It seems he keeps finding some oaf in his stateroom, and he can’t figure out what he’s doing there. He keeps asking the fellow—‘Vot you doink in mine staderoom?’ he keeps saying. But the fellow won’t answer. Then, after breakfast, I went for my morning stroll on deck. Met an interesting chap. Had an interesting story to tell. Seems he’s setting up a syndicate to trade candy bars for Picassos. I tried to invest in the scheme—but he wouldn’t let me in on it. That’s the way it is when a fellow gets a good thing going. Still, it was an interesting story, and it made my morning. I was feeling in fine fettle when I returned to my stateroom. So, the first thing I did, I filled the hypodermic with invisibility serum. I remember it as well as if it were only this morning. So don’t try to tell me that the hypodermic is empty.”

“Take a look for yourself, Doctor.”

Dr. X looked.

“Empty!” he shrieked.

“I hate to be an I-told-you-so, but—”

“It evaporated!” Dr. X moaned.

“Pardon?”

“I know I put it in there!” Dr. X insisted. “I’m sure! I’m positive! I specifically remember doing it. Right after breakfast. I got up about seven. Then I showered and dressed. Then I went down to the dining room—”

“Yes, yes, we know about your morning,” Max said. “But what about the serum?”

“Evaporated! Gone!” Dr. X sobbed. “Apparently when it’s exposed to the air it just disappears. I’m ruined! My money! Gone! My General Motors stock, my Thunderbird, my Wrigley’s spearmint! Gone!”

“Well . . . there are days that are like that,” Max said sympathetically.

“Ruined” Dr. X wailed. Angrily, he flung the hypodermic out the porthole.

“Ah, ah . . . temper, temper,” Max cautioned.

Dr. X sat down on his bunk and wept. “I’m nobody! Just plain old

Dr. X again!”

“Fame is fickle,” Max said consolingly.

“Max . . .” 99 said.

“Yes, 99?”

“Max . . . what’s all that commotion outside? Hear that?”

Max listened. “Voices . . . running . . . could it be the posse again?”

“I don’t think so, Max. It sounds different.”

“I’ll check on it,” Max said.

He went to the porthole and put his head out the opening.

“What is it, Max?”

Max pulled his head back in. “Passengers,” he replied. “They’re a bit excited.”

“Why, Max? What happened?”

Max turned to Dr. X. “As it turns out,” he said, “your serum didn’t evaporate, Doctor.”

Dr. X stared at him, red-eyed from weeping. “But I saw it myself. It wasn’t there.”

“What you mean is, you *didn’t* see it.”

“That’s what I said—it wasn’t there.”

“Oh, it was there, all right, Doctor. But, you were right about one thing. Exposure to the air *did* have an effect on it. It made it invisible.”

“My serum? It turned on itself?”

“Exactly. When you threw that hypodermic out the porthole, it was still full of serum. Unfortunately, you have a good arm. The hypodermic cleared the deck and landed in the ocean.”

“And now—?”

“Yes. That was what all the yelling was about. The ocean—as far as the naked eye can discern—has disappeared.”

“Then what is the ship floating on, Max?” 99 said.

“Oh, the ocean is still there,” Max said. “It’s just invisible.”

99 frowned. “That’s a little hard to imagine, Max.”

“Think of it as six guinea pigs,” he suggested.

99 frowned harder. “Yes, that helps,” she said. “Now, I can imagine it.”

“Ruined!” Dr. X moaned.

“You moaned that before,” Max said.

“I’m ruined *again*. This is the second time.”

“Yes, twice in one day is something to moan about,” Max admitted. “But, it shouldn’t be a surprise. After all, ruin, dishonor and cloudy skies are the usual result of trying to play ball with the Forces of Evil. Or, as a great philosopher once put it: Bad Guys Never Win!”

“I’ve learned my lesson,” Dr. X sobbed. “I’ll never experiment with invisibility again. I’ll stick to what I know—formulas for cake mixes.”

“You mean—?”

“Yes,” Dr. X replied, “that’s my regular work. I developed the invisibility formula by accident. I was working on a mix for an upside-down cake. Only, I got it wrong side up. I didn’t want to waste the batter I had left, though. So I added a few drops of coloring and just a pinch of salt—hoping that would turn it right side up—upside-down, that is.”

“But it didn’t work.”

“No. The whole thing disappeared. That’s when I realized that I had developed an invisibility serum.”

“That’s too bad,” Max said. “The world could use a good upside-down cake mix.”

“Maybe I’ll try again someday,” Dr. X said. “In a few years—after this episode today has become nothing but a bitter memory.”

“Well, good luck,” Max said, extending a hand. “It’s been a pleasant mission, Doctor. You’ve been a worthy adversary.”

“Nice of you to say so,” Dr. X replied, smiling, taking Max’s hand. “I hope we—”

Like a stone, Dr. X dropped to the floor.

“Your ring, Max,” 99 said. “You injected him with the paralyzing drug.”

Max looked down at the unconscious Dr. X. “Sorry about that,” he said.

“Shouldn’t we do something for him, Max?” 99 said.

“No. After what he’s been through today, he can probably use the rest,” Max said. “Let’s just tiptoe out. It’s the kindest thing we could do.”

In a kindly way, Max, 99 and Fang tiptoed out.

Max closed the stateroom door, then they walked down the corridor, and, a few moments later, stepped out on deck.

“It’s morning!” 99 said, surprised. “We were up all night!”

“Yes, there’s the rosy-fingered dawn,” Max said, “Gorgeous, isn’t it?”

“Lovely,” 99 sighed blissfully. “And, just think, Max—now we can enjoy it. Our mission is accomplished. For the next few days, we can relax and enjoy the cruise.”

“At least, what you can see of it from the brig,” a voice from behind them said.

As one, Max, 99 and Fang whipped around. Confronting them were the Captain and the nosy steward.

“Top o’ the morning to you, Captain,” Max said cheerily. “And the bottom o’ the morning to you, steward,” he added.

“They’re the ones who did it, Captain,” the steward said.

“I doubt it,” the Captain answered. “I don’t think they could handle it. Even if that is what happened.”

“What are we talking about?” Max asked.

“The ocean,” the Captain replied. “There’s a theory afoot that it’s been stolen.”

“I see. But you don’t believe it.”

“That’s pretty far-fetched,” the Captain said.

“I’ll go along with that,” Max said.

“It’s obvious what really happened,” the Captain said. “I told them back at the office that some day this was going to happen. If we keep driving these big ships back and forth through the ocean, I told them, some day it’s bound to happen.”

“What was bound to happen, Captain?”

“We wore it out,” the Captain replied. “You can’t drive a bunch of big ships back and forth through an ocean, year after year after year, and not expect it to finally wear out. It’s only water, you know. It’s not made of iron.”

“I see the logic of that,” Max said.

“Oh, well, no matter,” the Captain smiled. “It’ll be deductible from our income tax. Depreciation.”

“All’s well that ends well,” Max smiled.

“My sentiments exactly,” the Captain said. He turned to the steward. “Take these three to the brig.”

“Max—do something!” 99 begged. “I don’t want to spend the cruise in the brig!”

“Do you have any suggestions?” he said.

“Can’t we tell them who we really are, Max? What harm is there in it? After all, our mission is accomplished.”

“Rule 301, 99. A secret agent must never reveal his identity.”

“Oh, hang Rule 301!”

“Well, as a matter of fact, there is a qualifying clause to Rule 301,” Max said. “Let’s see . . . how does it go? Oh, yes! Rule 301, Clause A: ‘A secret agent must never reveal his identity unless it would be inconvenient not to do so.’ I think this situation is covered by that clause.”

“Tell them, Max”

“Captain . . . steward . . .” Max said, “. . . inconvenience forces me to reveal our true identities. The fact is, we are not a brilliant space scientist, his attractive assistant, and a scientific experiment. The truth of the matter is, we are dedicated secret agents, operating out of Control.”

“You’re out of control, all right, if you expect me to believe that,” the Captain said.

“If you won’t believe me, will you believe my assistant?” Max asked.

“She’s a pretty little thing,” the Captain said, “but those kind always tell the biggest whoppers.”

“All right, then, would you believe my dog?”

“Rorff!” Fang barked.

“That’s closer to it,” the Captain said. “But I’m still nagged by a pinch of a doubt.”

“Then,” Max said hopefully, “would you believe the Chief?”

“That guy in the Injun Room? Why should I believe him? He sold me a ballpoint pen that burns holes in the paper everytime I try to write a check.”

“This is a different Chief,” Max explained. “The Chief I’m referring to is head of Control.”

“Well . . . I’ll listen to his story,” the Captain said. “Where is he?”

“Back on the mainland,” Max replied.

The Captain turned to the steward again. “Lock ’em up.”

“Hold it!” Max said. “In spite of the fact that the Chief is hundreds—nay, thousands—of miles away, I am still able to communicate with him.”

“How?” the Captain said dubiously.

“I’ll call him on my shoe,” Max replied.

“Lock ’em up!”

“Hold it again!” Max protested. “You didn’t give me a chance to explain. You see, in fact, my shoe is really a telephone.”

The Captain smiled. "After you get out of the brig," he said, "you'll have to drop by my stateroom. I have a compass up there that will interest you. It's really a dozen-and-a-half avocado pears."

"Just let me prove to you that my shoe is a telephone," Max said. "That's all I ask—the chance to call the Chief on my shoe."

The Captain rolled his eyes heavenward. "Granted," he said.

Max removed his shoe, then dialed.

*Max:* Hello, Chief? This is Agent 86. Come in, please.

(silence)

*Max:* Chief? Are you there, Chief? Come in, Chief! This is Max. Please come in, Chief. The fate of an entire cruise hangs in the balance.

(silence)

Max hung up his shoe. "It seems we've lost contact," he said to the Captain. "I was afraid that might happen when we got this far out to sea."

"Are you sure?" the Captain said. "Maybe the Chief didn't hear his phone ringing. Maybe he was in the shower."

"Nooooo, I'm afraid I've lost contact."

"You didn't drop a dime in the heel," the Captain said. "Maybe that's what went wrong."

"Captain, believe me, I have lost contact."

"You're giving up too easily," the Captain said. "Let me try it."

Max took off his shoe and handed it to the Captain. The Captain dialed.

*Captain:* Hello, Chief? You there? This is the Captain speaking. Come in.

*Chief:* What-um want-um, Cap?

*Captain:* I'll tell you what I want—a little matter of five bucks for a ballpoint pen that burns holes in my checks!

*Chief:* Sposed to use-um ballpoint pen under water-um, Cap. Water-um put-um out fire.

*Captain:* How can I do that? No water. The last ship that went through here wore it out completely.

*Chief:* *Caveat emptor*, Cap.

*Captain:* What does *that* mean?

*Chief:* You give-um me back Manhattan Island, I give-um you back five bucks you pay-um for pen.

*Captain:* Listen, Chief, I'm not the kind who pulls rank, but . . .

The debate continued.

"Max, do you think the Captain is really going to throw us back in the brig?" 99 said.

"I don't think he'll get around to it, 99," Max replied. "The way this is going, I suspect he'll be on the phone for the rest of the trip."

99 yawned. "I'm tired, Max."

"Better turn in for a nap," Max said.

"Rorff!"

"All right, you, too, Fang."

"Aren't you coming, Max?" 99 said.

Max sighed wearily. "No," he said, looking painfully at the Captain. "I have to wait for my shoe."

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



WILLIAM JOHNSTON (1924-2010), author of many movie and TV tie-in novels was born January 11th, 1924 and passed away October 15th, 2010.

On January 4th, 2010, The International Association of Media Tie-in Writers [www://iamtw.org](http://iamtw.org) announced it was bestowing The *Faust*, its Grand Master Award for excellence, to author William Johnston, the writer of over a hundred tie-in novels and the most prolific practitioner of the craft.

(From the January/February 2010 Newsletter - IAMTW)  
The Newsletter of the International Association  
of Media Tie-in Writers

**IAMTW's GRAND MASTER SCRIBE AWARD,  
THE *FAUST*, GOES TO THE GENRE'S MOST  
PROLIFIC PRACTITIONER**

By David Spencer

The inarguable preeminent author of tie-ins, with more published tie-in titles to his credit (well more than 100) than any writer in the game before or since—the legendary and until now somewhat elusive William Johnston—will be honored by the IAMTW with a Faust Award, the honor bestowed upon Grand Masters. He is currently residing in San Jose, California, and will turn 86 on January 11th, 2010—a fitting number, as it is his series of novels based on the spy sitcom *Get Smart*, about Secret Agent 86 for CONTROL, which turned his byline into a virtual tie-in “brand” and thereafter defined the nature of his tie-in (and the largest proportion of his literary) career as the industry’s comedy specialist.

Johnston’s style is paradoxically recognizable, despite seeming matter of fact and transparent, his narration employing little reliance on metaphor, idiosyncratic locution or other literary manipulation. But the ostensible simplicity is utterly deceptive: for in the “serious” books, depth of characterization sneaks up on the reader, dialogue and internalization unusually nuanced, layered and when appropriate even subtle, with a psychological perception very ahead of its time.

Johnston’s humorous novels are a textbook lesson on comic timing in prose, possibly because he had some experience as an actor (a signature of his books is writing phone conversations as play-format dialogue exchanges, woodshedding redundant “he said” and “she said”).

He knew the wisdom and the technique of “simply” staying out of the way, and letting the tale be carried by action, dialogue, and an impeccable sense of cadence and rhythm. Plus his own unique brand of whimsy and wordplay.

Johnston’s career started in 1960 with the release of a hardcover comic murder mystery, *The Marriage Cage* (Lyle Stuart, reissued in paperback by Dell), which earned him a Best First Novel Edgar Award nomination from the Mystery Writers of America. Curiously, this did not lead immediately to more mystery novels (though he would write mystery tie-ins later in his career), but rather to a number of early 60s pulp titles for Monarch Books, which ranged from light comedy (*The Power of Positive Loving*) to medical romance (the *Doctor Starr* trilogy) to soft core racy (*Save Her for Loving*, *Teen Age Tramp*, *Girls on the Wing*).

The medical novels in particular either dovetailed with, or led to, his first tie-in commissions, which were for original novels based on medical dramas, such as *The Nurses* (Bantam), *Doctor Kildare* (Lancer and Whitman) and *Ben Casey*. These books, published between 1962 and 1964, were so successful that a cover variant on *The Nurses* includes a “2nd Big Printing” starburst; and his next (and it would

seem last) original medical romance, *Two Loves Has Nurse Powell* (Neva Paperbacks) trumpets “From the author of *Ben Casey*. ”

It’s likely that among these books, the *Doctor Kildare* title written for Whitman’s young audience line was a significant pivot point, because in 1965, Tempo Books (the Young Audience paperback imprint of Grosset & Dunlop) commissioned Johnston to write *Get Smart*, an original novel based on the spy satire sitcom starring Don Adams, Barbara Feldon, and Edward Platt, created by Mel Brooks and Buck Henry. The first *Get Smart* book proved so staggeringly popular, going through multiple printings, that follow ups were immediately commissioned, leading to what would become a series of nine books over the course of the show’s five-season history.

That doesn’t sound like much in new millennium terms, but in the 60s it amounted to a single-author original tie-in grand slam, outdistanced only by the *Dark Shadows* series authored by Dan (as “Marilyn”) Ross. Indeed, it was the third place holder for TV tie-in series originals in general, with only the 23-book *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* series—by multiple authors—between it and *Dark Shadows*. (James Blish’s 12 book *Star Trek* series for Bantam, which continued into the 70s, did not feature original tales, but was rather comprised exclusively of short stories adapting the show’s teleplays.)

Johnson’s gig as Maxwell Smart’s official novelist in turn led to his becoming the go-to guy for sitcom-based novels in general. Continuing with Tempo Books from the rest of the decade into the mid-70s, he authored a one-shot based on the short-lived *Captain Nice* (starring William Daniels of *1776* and also created by Buck Henry) and book series based on *Room 222*, *Happy Days*, and *Welcome Back, Kotter*. Concurrently he also authored books based on *The Flying Nun* for Ace, as well as *The Brady Bunch* and *Nanny and the Professor* (Lancer). As if that weren’t plenty, he also did sitcom novels for Whitman, including titles based on *The Munsters*, *Gilligan’s Island*, *Bewitched*, *The Monkees*, and *F-Troop*.

Though the sitcom novels dominated Johnston’s tie-in career, and were the work with which he was reflexively identified, he still did a catalog’s worth of work in just about every other TV tie-in genre except science fiction and military. He authored one-off mysteries based on *My Friend Tony* (Lancer), *Ironside* (Whitman), and the comic strip *Dick Tracy* (Tempo), a two-book series based on the American Revolution youth historical, *The Young Rebels*, and an original Western based on *The Iron Horse* (Popular Library). Under pseudonyms he tackled social drama, with a book based on Rod Serling’s *The New People* (as “Alex Steele” for Tempo) and two based on *Matt Lincoln* (as “Ed Garth” for Lancer). His catalog even includes a smattering of

juvenilia, with Whitman Big Little books based on Hanna Barbera cartoon characters such as Magilla Gorilla and Snagglepuss, among others. (According to the late Howard Ashman—whose day job, before *Little Shop of Horrors* made him a musical theatre icon, was assistant editor at Ace/Tempo during Johnston's most prolific period—Johnston's services as sitcom specialist were so much in demand that, simply to keep up the pace and meet the deadlines, he would occasionally create detailed outlines which would then be farmed out to anonymous "ghosts" for fleshing out. Since the style remains consistent, one assumes Johnston added the final polish.)

Aside from his TV tie-in originals, Johnston penned many script novelizations, again in multiple genres. He novelized the pilots for the 1930s-era private eye series *Banyon* (Warner) and the high school drama *Sons and Daughters* (Ballantine). His feature film novelizations include (and may not be limited to) Alan J. Pakula's controversial *Klute*, *The Swinger*, *Echoes of a Summer*, Robert Bloch's *Asylum*, *The New Interns*, *The April Fools*, *The Priest's Wife*, Disney's *Lt. Robin Crusoe*, *USN* (written as "Bill Ford") and *Angel, Angel, Down We Go*. If you note that *The Swinger* was published under the Dell imprint and review the publishers named in this release, another astonishing fact emerges: Johnston tie-ins seem to have been issued by every major paperback house of the era, with the exception of Fawcett.

Which is not to say that Fawcett didn't publish him: during this period he, like a lot of male pulpsmiths, also wrote gothic romances behind a female pseudonym. His were published—by Fawcett—under the name "Susan Claudia." Johnston's wholly original work became scarce once he was established as a tie-in machine, but it didn't altogether disappear. Aside from the Susan Claudia gothics, he also authored *The Manipulator* (Lancer, 1968, reissued under Magnum), a racy paperback potboiler about an ambitious business executive fighting the odds to get a revolutionary jetliner into the air; and in hardcover, a novel about an overweight, bigoted beat cop called *Barney* (Random House, 1970, reissued in paperback by Warner).

*Barney* was his longest novel ever, clocking in at 307 pages. The page count is an interesting statistic owing to the period in which Johnston wrote: at that time, tie-in novels were typically shorter than they are today—as indeed were genre novels in general—and a typical Johnston paperback ranged from between 128-144 pages of small print to 160-190 pages of moderate print. By those standards, his two longest original tie-ins, the small print releases *The Nurses* at approximately 224 (Bantam) and *The Iron Horse* at approximately 190 (Popular Library) were tie-in epics.

Johnston's last book— anyway, his last as far as can be determined

—was an atypically “epic” small-print novelization, of the likewise epic, and thoroughly notorious film *Caligula* (Warner, 1979, 222 pages). As shamelessly salacious as the film apparently was, the book sported the byline “William Howard,” possibly to avoid inappropriately attracting the younger readers who flocked to his sitcom pastiches. Indeed, the book had its own notoriety, for it was originally released in advance of the film—with the film’s logo design (a Roman coin featuring an embossed close-up likeness of Malcolm McDowell in the title role) against a tan background—as *Gore Vidal’s Caligula*. But soon after, all unsold copies of the print run were recalled, as Vidal had filed suit to have his name taken off Bob Guccione’s vulgarized film. Vidal lost the suit, but his name was removed from the book, which was reissued with the logo against an ironically lily white background as simply *Caligula*, with no screenplay attribution.

The following profile comes from the premier edition back cover of Johnston’s first book, *The Marriage Cage*, and constitutes virtually the only bio of any meaningful detail he allowed on any of his books (he is quoted as having said, “I wanted to stay as anonymous as possible”). Based on its irreverent style, it’s safe to assume Johnston wrote it himself:

William Johnston was born in Lincoln, Illinois on January 11, 1924.

He ended his formal education after three years of high school, when he left home and school at seventeen to become an actor. Claims he was a lousy actor.

Joined the Navy in 1942 after seeing a Naval band marching in a newsreel. Has tried to avoid newsreels ever since. Served in the Pacific. After the war, he became a disk jockey for radio station WTAX, Springfield, Illinois. A year later, he became a wandering disk jockey, working at stations in Illinois and Indiana.

In another year, as Johnston tells the story, he, with two acquaintances and one client, formed an advertising agency in Chicago. For certain mystic reasons, they named it Merchants Limited, after a train that ran between Boston and New York. The day after the agency was formed, the client came to his senses and pulled out. Agency disbanded.

He was for two years the associate editor of *The Lion*, magazine of the International Association of the Lions Clubs.

For the past nine years he has been a public relations account executive. At the moment he handles the Lionel trains account for

Tex McCrary's public relations agency.

After *Caligula*, Johnston—who had amassed millions of fans yet little meaningful literary recognition—tired of writing and decided to become—

—wait for it—

—a bartender.

Then living on Long Island, New York, he attended bartending school and graduated to find that he was considered too old to hire. His solution was to buy his *own* bar, which he did. It was called *The Blind Pig*; it was located in Massapequa, and he ran it very successfully until his retirement.